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NGELS UNAWARES

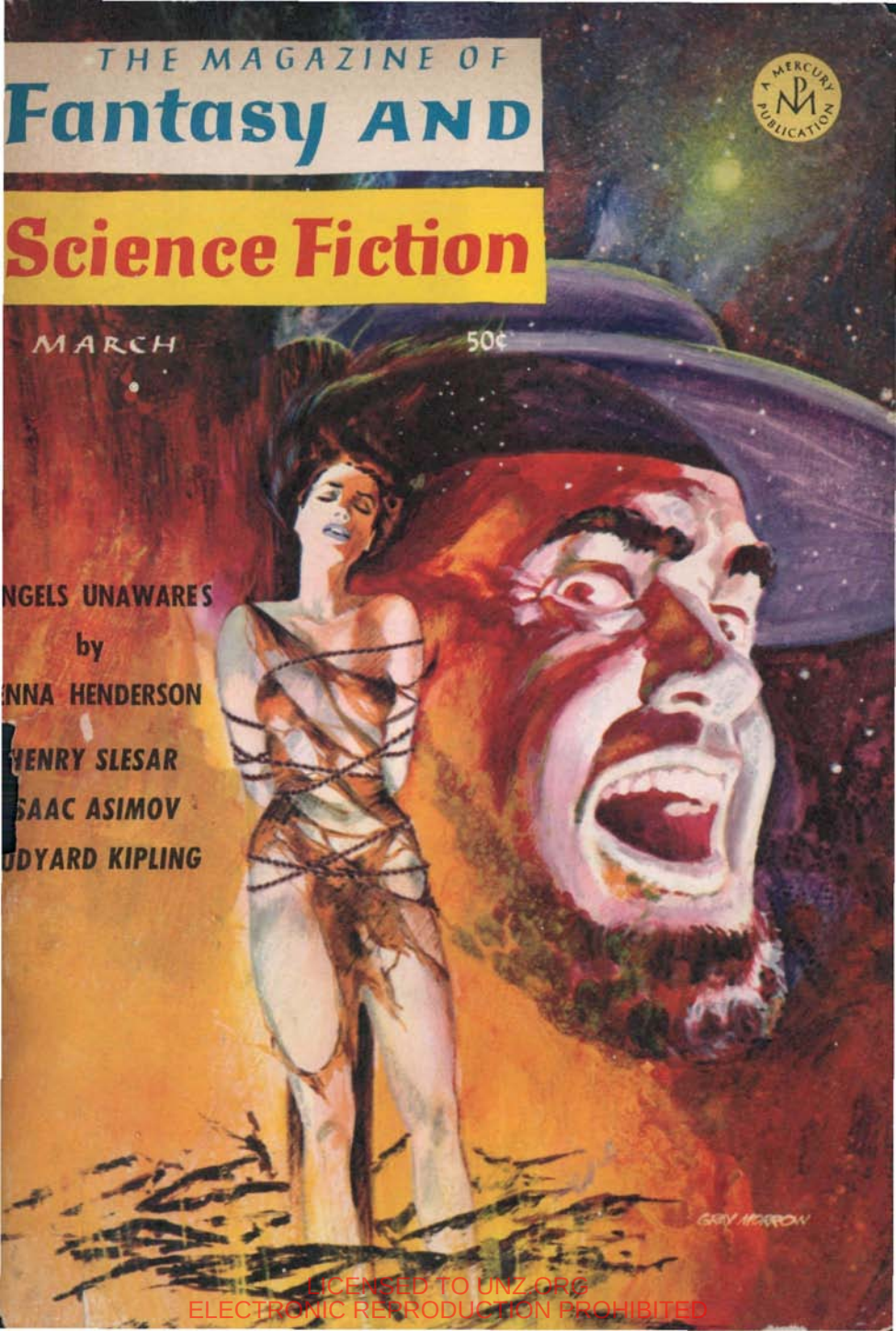
by

NNA HENDERSON

HENRY SLESAR

SAAC ASIMOV

DYARD KIPLING



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARCH *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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EDITORIAL

When an unknown author—you, let us say—sends us a story, he is most likely to receive a rejection slip which concludes, "the large number of manuscripts received does not permit us time for personal comment."

We receive between seventy-five and ninety "unsolicited submissions" every week. And, obviously, if we made a personal comment on all of them, we would have little time for anything else. So we are forced to ignore the requests for criticism which often accompany a manuscript.

One out of about 500 stories from among the "slush pile" of stories from unknowns will make it into print in this Magazine. So the odds are heavily in favor of your story being rejected. Why?

Most stories by beginning authors fall into one or more of a number of traps. The most common, and one for which we can supply no constructive advice, is that the story is poorly written. By that, we are referring to stories which do not merely defy the rules of grammar and punctuation, but which are also clumsily constructed, with awkward narrative, stiff dialogue, and unbelievable motivation.

More frustrating for your editors; however, are the stories without such obvious failings—the stories which *almost* make it. The faults in these are more subtle, and sometimes involve the content of the story more than the quality of writing. In many cases, the theme or plot is too unoriginal. Sometimes such stories have, we feel, been overdone in these pages—others we just don't want to see here. We are, to put it simply, not interested in plots dredged up out of old horror comic books, and we doubt that *if* a man could invent a time-travel machine in his basement, the best use he could find for it would be to murder his wife.

Many of the stories we reject are based on *gimmicks*, rather than plots. The story is built around the gimmick (usually reserved for a "surprise" ending which was no surprise to us), with no character development, no conflict, and no resolution.

We get the reverse, too, of course: a reasonably well-plotted story which is simply inadequately written. Of these we can only hope the author will mature his style and try us again later.

Many ask us, "If this isn't a suitable story, what *do* you want?"

We have the broadest requirements of any magazine in this field. We want fantasy, and we want science fiction. We want good stories. We are less inclined to haggle over categories than most magazines. And, to put it into a nutshell, we want the kind of stories you enjoy reading. So write us a story about a character we can believe in and identify with, whose problems will concern us. And tell us the story convincingly. If you can do that, we'll buy it.

—Ted White

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The emigration of Zenna Henderson's "People" for Earth and the individual adventures of that race after their arrival have been laid against various and fascinating backgrounds; none, perhaps, so interesting as this picture of western United States in the 19th Century. In this story, a mining engineer and his wife discover the ruins of a burned house. Among the ashes are four bodies, cruelly bound and left to die, a scrap of paper with a quotation from the Bible, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and one survivor, a young girl, mute and mysterious.

ANGELS UNAWARES

by Zenna Henderson

I STILL HAVE IT, THE ODD, flower-shaped piece of metal, showing the flow marks on top and the pocking of sand and gravel on its bottom. It fits my palm comfortably with my fingers clasped around it, and has fitted it so often that the edges are smooth and burnished now—smooth against the fine white line of the scar where the sharp, shining, still-hot edge gashed me when I snatched it up, unbelievingly, from where it had dripped, molten, from the sloping wall to the sandy floor of the canyon beyond Margin. It is a Remembrance thing and, as I handled it just now, looking unseeingly out across the multiple roofs of Margin Today, it recalled to me vividly Margin Yesterday—and even before Margin.

We had been on the road only an hour when we came upon the scene. For fifteen minutes or so before, however, there had been an odd smell on the wind, one that crinkled my nose and made old Nig snort and toss his head, shaking the harness and disturbing Prince who lifted his patient head, looked around briefly, then returned to the task.

We were the task, Nils and I and our wagonload of personal belongings, trailing behind us Molly, our young jersey cow. We were on our way to Margin to establish a home. Nils was to start his

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shining new mining engineering career, beginning as superintendent of the mine that had given birth to Margin. This was to be a first step only, of course, leading to more accomplished, more rewarding positions culminating in all the vague, bright, but most wonderful of futures that could blossom from this rather unprepossessing present seed. We were as yet three days journey from Margin when we rounded the sharp twist of the trail, our iron tires grating in the sand of the wash, and discovered the flat.

Nils pulled the horses up to a stop. A little below us and near the protective bulge of the grey granite hillside were the ruins of a house and the crumpled remains of sheds at one end of a staggering corral. A plume of smoke lifted finger-straight in the early morning air. There was not a sign of life anywhere.

Nils flapped the reins and clucked to the horses. We crossed the flat, lurching a little when the left wheels dipped down into one of the cuts that, after scoring the flat, disappeared into the creek.

"Must have burned down last night," said Nils, securing the reins and jumping down. He lifted his arms to help me from the high seat and held me in a tight, brief hug as he always does. Then he released me and we walked over to the crumple of the corral.

"All the sheds went," he said, "and apparently the animals, too." He twisted his face at the smell that rose from the smoldering mass.

"They surely would have saved the animals," I said, frowning. "They wouldn't have left them locked in a burning shed."

"If they were here when the fire hit," said Nils.

I looked over at the house. "Not much of a house. It doesn't look lived in at all. Maybe this is an abandoned homestead. In that case, though, what about the animals?"

Nils said nothing. He had picked up a length of stick and was prodding in the ashes.

"I'm going to look at the house," I said, glad of an excuse to turn away from the heavy odor of charred flesh.

The house was falling in on itself. The door wouldn't open and the drunken windows spilled a few shards of splintered glass out into the sagging front porch. I went around to the back. It had been built so close to the rock that there was only a narrow roofed-over passage between the rock and the house. The back door sagged on one hinge and I could see the splintered floor beyond. It must have been quite a nice place at one time—glass in the windows—a board floor—when most of us in the Territory made-do with a hard trampled dirt floor and butter muslin in the windows.

I edged through the door and

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cautiously picked my way across the creaking, groaning floor. I looked up to see if there was a loft of any kind and felt my whole body throb one huge throb of terror and surprise! Up against the sharp splintering of daylight through a shattered roof, was a face—looking down at me! It was a wild, smudged, dirty face, surrounded by a frizz of dark hair that tangled and whisped across the filthy cheeks. It stared down at me from up among the tatters of what had been a muslin ceiling, then the mouth opened soundlessly, and the eyes rolled and went shut. I lunged forward, almost instinctively, and caught the falling body full in my arms, crumpling under it to the floor. Beneath me the splintered planks gave way and sagged down into the shallow air space under the floor.

I screamed, "Nils!" and heard an answering, "Gail!" and the pounding of his running feet.

We carried the creature outside the ruined house and laid it on the scanty six-weeks grass that followed over the sand, like a small green river, the folds in the earth that held moisture the longest. We straightened the crumpled arms and legs and it was a creature no longer but a girl-child. I tried to pull down the tattered skirt to cover more seemly, but the bottom edge gave way without tearing and I had the soft smudge of burned fabric and soot between my fingers. I lifted the head to smooth the sand under it and stopped, my attention caught.

"Look, Nils, the hair. Half of it's burned away. This poor child must have been in the fire. She must have tried to free the animals—"

"It's not animals," said Nils, his voice tight and angered; "They're people."

"People!" I gasped. "Oh, no!"

"At least four," nodded Nils.

"Oh, how awful!" I said, smoothing the stub of hair away from the quiet face. "The fire must have struck in the night."

"They were tied," said Nils shortly. "Hand and foot."

"Tied? But Nils—"

"Tied. Deliberately burned—"

"Indians!" I gasped, scrambling to my feet through the confusion of my skirts. "Oh, Nils!"

"There have been no Indian raids in the Territory for almost five years. And the last one was on the other side of the Territory. They told me at Margin that there had never been any raids around here. There are no Indians in this area."

"Then who—what—" I dropped down beside the still figure, "Oh, Nils," I whispered. "What kind of a country have we come to?"

"No matter what kind it is," said Nils. "We have a problem here. Is the child dead?"

"No." My hand on the thin chest felt the slight rise and fall of breathing. Quickly I flexed arms

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and legs and probed lightly. "I can't find any big hurt. But so dirty and ragged!"

We found the spring under a granite overhang halfway between the house and the corral. Nils rummaged among our things in the wagon and found me the hand basin, some rags and soap. We lighted a small fire and heated water in a battered bucket Nils dredged out of the sand below the spring. While the water was heating, I stripped away the ragged clothing. The child had on some sort of a one-piece undergarment that fitted as closely as her skin and was as flexible. It covered her from shoulder to upper thigh and the rounding of her body under it made me revise my estimate of her age upward a little. The garment was undamaged by the fire but I couldn't find any way to unfasten it to remove it so I finally left it and wrapped the still unconscious girl in a quilt. Then carefully I bathed her, except for her hair, wiping the undergarment, which came clean and bright without any effort at all. I put her into one of my nightgowns that came close enough to fitting her since I am of no great size myself.

"What shall I do about her hair?" I asked Nils, looking at the snarled, singed tousle of it. "Half of it is burned off clear up to her ear."

"Cut the rest of it to match," Nils. "Is she burned anywhere?"

"No," I replied, puzzled. "Not a sign of a burn, and yet her clothing was almost burned away and her hair—" I felt a shiver across my shoulders and looked around the flat apprehensively, though nothing could be more flatly commonplace than the scene. Except—except for the occasional sullen whisp of smoke from the shed ruins.

"Here are the scissors." Nils brought them from the wagon. Reluctantly, because of the heavy flow of the tresses across my wrist, I cut away the long dark hair until both sides of her head matched, more or less. Then, scooping out the sand to lower the basin beneath her head, I wet and lathered and rinsed until the water came clear, then carefully dried the hair that, released from length and dirt, sprang into profuse curls all over her head.

"What a shame to have cut it," I said to Nils, holding the damp head in the curve of my elbow. "How lovely it must have been." Then I nearly dropped my burden. The eyes were open and looking at me blankly. I managed a smile and said, "Hello! Nils, hand me a cup of water."

At first she looked at the water as though at a cup of poison, then, with a shuddering little sigh, drank it down in large hasty gulps.

"That's better now, isn't it?" I said, hugging her a little. There was no answering word or smile,

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but only a slow tightening of the muscles under my hands until, still in my arms, the girl had withdrawn from me completely. I ran my hand over her curls. "I'm sorry we had to cut it, but it was—" I bit back my words. I felt muscles lifting, so I helped the girl sit up. She looked around in a daze and then her eyes were caught by a sullen up-puff of smoke. Seeing what she was seeing, I swung my shoulder between her and the ashes of the shed. Her mouth opened, but no sound came out. Her fingers bit into my arm as she dragged herself to see past me.

"Let her look," Nils said. "She knows what happened. Let her see the end of it. Otherwise she'll wonder all her life." He took her from me and carried her over to the corral. I couldn't go. I busied myself with emptying the basin and burying the charred clothing. I spread the quilt out to receive the child when they returned.

Nils finally brought her back and put her down on the quilt. She lay, eyes shut, as still as if breath had left her, too. Then two tears worked themselves out of her closed lids, coursed down the sides of her cheeks and lost themselves in the tumble of curls around her ears. Nils took the shovel and grimly tackled the task of burying the bodies.

I built up the fire again and began to fix dinner. The day was spending itself rapidly but, late or not, when Nils finished, we would leave. Eating a large meal now, we could piece for supper and travel, if necessary, into the hours of darkness until this place was left far behind.

Nils finally came back, pausing at the spring to snort and blow through double handful after double handful of water. I met him with a towel.

"Dinner's ready," I said. "We can leave as soon as we're finished."

"Look what I found." He handed me a smudged tatter of paper. "It was nailed to the door of the shed. The door didn't burn."

I held the paper gingerly and puzzled over it. The writing was almost illegible—Ex 22:18.

"What is it?" I asked. "It doesn't say anything."

"Quotation," said Nils. "That's a quotation from the Bible."

"Oh," I said. "Yes. Let's see. Exodus, chapter 22, verse 18. Do you know it?"

"I'm not sure, but I have an idea. Can you get at the Bible? I'll verify it."

"It's packed in one of my boxes at the bottom of the load. Shall we —"

"Not now," said Nils. "Tonight when we make camp."

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

"I'd rather wait," said Nils. "I hope I'm wrong."

We ate. I tried to rouse the girl, but she turned away from me. I put

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half a slice of bread in her hand and closed her fingers over it and tucked it close to her mouth. Halfway through our silent meal, a movement caught my eye. The girl had turned to hunch herself over her two hands that now clasped the bread, tremblingly. She was chewing cautiously. She swallowed with an effort and stuffed her mouth again with bread, tears streaking down her face. She ate as one starved, and, when she had finished the bread, I brought her a cup of milk. I lifted her shoulders and held her as she drank. I took the empty cup and lowered her head to the quilt. For a moment my hand was caught under her head and I felt a brief deliberate pressure of her cheek against my wrist. Then she turned away.

Before we left the flat, we prayed over the single mound Nils had raised over the multiple grave. We had brought the girl over with us and she lay quietly, watching us. When we turned from our prayers, she held out in a shaking hand a white flower, so white that it almost seemed to cast a light across her face. I took it from her and put it gently on the mound. Then Nils lifted her and carried her to the wagon. I stayed a moment, not wanting to leave the grave lonely so soon. I shifted the white flower. In the sunlight its petals seemed to glow with an inner light, the golden center almost fluid. I wondered what kind of flower it could be. I lifted it and saw that it was just a daisy-looking flower after all, withering already in the heat of the day. I put it down again, gave a last pat to the mound, a last tag of prayer, and went back to the wagon.

By the time we made camp that night we were too exhausted from the forced miles and the heat and the events of the day to do anything but care for the animals and fall onto our pallets spread on the ground near the wagon. We had not made the next water hole because of the delay, but we carried enough water to tide us over. I was too tired to eat, but I roused enough to feed Nils on leftovers from dinner and to strain Molly's milk into the milk crock. I gave the girl a cup of the fresh, warm milk and some more bread. She downed them both with a contained eagerness as though still starved. Looking at her slender shaking wrists and the dark hollows of her face, I wondered how long she had been so hungry.

We all slept heavily under the star-clustered sky, but I was awakened somewhere in the shivery coolness of the night and reached to be sure the girl was covered. She was sitting up on the pallet, legs crossed tailor fashion, looking up at the sky. I could see the turning of her head as she scanned the whole sky, back and forth, from zenith to horizon. Then she straightened slowly back down onto the quilt with an audible sigh.

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I looked at the sky, too. It was spectacular with the stars of a moonless night here in the region of mountains and plains, but what had she been looking for? Perhaps she had just been enjoying being alive and able, still, to see the stars.

We started on again, very early, and made the next watering place while the shadows were still long with dawn.

"The wagons were here," said Nils. "Night before last, I guess."

"What wagons?" I asked, pausing in my dipping of water.

"We've been in their tracks ever since the flat back there," said Nils. "Two light wagons and several riders."

"Probably old tracks—" I started. "Oh, but you said they were here night before last. Do you suppose they had anything to do with the fire back there?"

"No signs of them before we got to the flat," said Nils "Two recent campfires here—as if they stayed the night here and made a special trip to the flat and back here again for the next night."

"A special trip," I shivered. "Surely you can't think that civilized people in this 19th century could be so violent—so—so—I mean people just don't—" My words died before the awful image in my mind.

"Don't tie up other people and burn them?" Nils started shifting the water keg back towards the wagon. "Gail, our next camp is supposed to be at Grafton's Vow. I think we'd better take time to dig out the Bible before we go on."

So we did. And we looked at each other over Nils' pointing finger and the flattened paper he had taken from the shed door.

"Oh, surely not!" I cried horrified. "It can't be! Not in this day and age!"

"It can be," said Nils. "In any age when people pervert goodness, love and obedience and set up a god small enough to fit their shrunken souls." And his finger traced again the brief lines: *Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*

"Why did you want to check that quotation before we got to Grafton's Vow?" I asked.

"Because it's that kind of place," said Nils. "They warned me at the County Seat. In fact, some thought it might be wise to take the other trail—a day longer—one dry camp—but avoid Grafton's Vow. There have been tales of stonings and—"

"What kind of place is it, anyway?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," said Nils. "I've heard some very odd stories about it though. It was founded about twenty years ago by Arnold Grafton. He brought his little flock of followers out here to establish the new Jerusalem. They're very strict and narrow. Don't argue with them and no levity or lewdness. No breaking of God's laws of which they say they have all. When they

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ran out of Biblical ones, they received a lot more from Grafton to fill in where God forgot."

"But," I was troubled. "Aren't they Christians?"

"They say so." I helped Nils lift the keg. "Except they believe they have to conform to all the Old Testament laws, supplemented by all those that Grafton has dictated. Then, if they obey enough of them well enough after a lifetime of struggle, Christ welcomes them into a heaven of no laws. Every law they succeed in keeping on earth, they will be exempted from keeping for all of eternity. So the stricter observance here, the greater freedom there. Imagine what their heaven must be—teetotaler here—rigidly chaste here—never steal here—just save up for the promised Grand Release!"

"And Mr. Grafton had enough followers of *that* doctrine to found a town?" I asked, a little stunned.

"A whole town," said Nils. "Into which we will not be admitted. There is a campground outside the place where we will be tolerated for the night if they decide we won't contaminate the area."

At noon we stopped just after topping out at Millman's Pass. The horses, lathered and breathing heavily, and poor dragged-along Molly, drooped grateful heads in the shadows of the aspen and pines.

I busied myself with the chuck box and was startled to see the girl sliding out of the wagon where we had bedded her down for the trip. She clung to the side of the wagon and winced as her feet landed on the gravelly hillside. She looked very young and slender and lost in the fullness of my nightgown, but her eyes weren't quite so sunken and her mouth was tinged with color.

I smiled at her. "That gown is sort of long for mountain climbing. Tonight I'll try to get to my other clothes and see if I can find something. I think my old blue skirt—" I stopped because she very obviously wasn't understanding a word I was saying. I took a fold of the gown she wore and said, "Gown."

She looked down at the crumpled white muslin and then at me but said nothing.

I put a piece of bread into her hands and said, "Bread." She put the bread down carefully on the plate where I had stacked the other slices for dinner and said nothing. Then she glanced around, looked at me and, turning, walked briskly into the thick underbrush, her elbows high to hold the extra length up above her bare feet.

"Nils!" I called in sudden panic. "She's leaving!"

Nils laughed at me across the tarp he was spreading. "Even the best of us," he said, "have to duck into the bushes once in a while!"

"Oh, Nils!" I protested and felt my face redden as I carried the bread plate to the tarp. "Anyway,

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she shouldn't be running around in a nightgown like that. What would Mr. Grafton say! And have you noticed? She hasn't made a sound since we found her." I brought the eating things to the tarp. "Not one word. Not one sound."

"Hmm," said Nils. "You're right. Maybe she's a deaf-mute."

"She hears," I said. "I'm sure she hears."

"Maybe she doesn't speak English," he suggested. "Her hair is dark. Maybe she's Mexican. Or even Italian. We get all kinds out here on the frontier. No telling where she might be from."

"But you'd think she'd make some sound. Or try to say something," I insisted.

"Might be the shock," said Nils soberly. "That was an awful thing to live through."

"That's probably it, poor child." I looked over to where she had disappeared. "An awful thing. Let's call her Marnie, Nils," I suggested. "We need some sort of name to call her by."

Nils laughed. "Would having the name close to you reconcile you a little to being separated from your little sister?"

I smiled back. "It does sound homey—Marnie, Marnie."

As if I had called her, the girl, Marnie, came back from the bushes, the long gown not quite trailing the slope, completely covering her bare feet. Both her hands were occupied with the long stem of redbells she was examining closely. *How graceful she is,* I thought, *How smoothly*— Then my breath went out and I clutched the plate I held. That gown was a good foot too long for Marnie! She couldn't possibly be walking with it not quite trailing the ground without holding it up! And where was the pausing that came between steps? I hissed at Nils. "Look!" I whispered hoarsely, "She's—she's floating! She's not even touching the ground!"

Just at that moment Marnie read our faces. Her face crumpled into terror and she dropped down to the ground. Not only down to her feet, but on down into a huddle on the ground with the spray of flowers crushed under her.

I ran to her and tried to lift her, but she suddenly convulsed into a mad struggle to escape me. Nils came to help. We fought to hold the child who was so violent that I was afraid she'd hurt herself.

"She's—she's afraid!" I gasped. "Maybe she thinks—we'll—kill her!"

"Here!" Nils finally caught a fast flailing arm and pinioned it. "*Talk* to her! Do something! I can't hold her much longer!"

"Marnie, Marnie!" I smoothed the tangled curls back from her blank, tense face, trying to catch her attention. "Marnie, don't be afraid!" I tried a smile. "Relax, honey, don't be so scared." I wiped

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her sweat and tear-streaked face with the corner of my apron. "There, there, it doesn't matter—we won't hurt you—" I murmured on and on, wondering if she was taking in any of it, but finally the tightness began to go out of her body and at last she dropped, exhausted, in Nils' arms. I gathered her to me and comforted her against my shoulder.

"Get her a cup of milk," I said to Nils. "And bring me one, too." My smile wavered. "This is hard work!"

In the struggle I had almost forgotten what had started it, but it came back to me as I led Marnie to the spring and demonstrated that she should wash her face and hands. She did so, following my example, and dried herself on the flour-sack towel I handed her. Then, when I started to turn away, she sat down on a rock by the flowing water, lifted the sadly bedraggled gown and slipped her feet into the stream. When she lifted each to dry it, I saw the reddened, bruised soles and said, "No wonder you didn't want to walk. Wait a minute." I went back to the wagon and got my old slippers, and, as an afterthought, several pins. Marnie was still sitting by the stream, leaning over the water, letting it flow between her fingers. She put on the slippers—woefully large for her, and stood watching with interest as I turned up the bottom of the gown and pinned it.

"Now," I said. "Now at least you can walk. But this gown will be ruined if we don't get you into some other clothes."

We ate dinner and Marnie ate some of everything we did, after a cautious tasting and a waiting to see how we handled it. She helped me gather up and put away the leftovers and clear the tarp. She even helped with the dishes—all with an absorbed interest as if learning a whole new set of skills.

As our wagon rolled on down the road, Nils and I talked quietly, not to disturb Marnie as she slept in the back of the wagon.

"She's an odd child," I said. "Nils, do you think she really was floating? How could she have? It's impossible."

"Well, it looked as if she was floating," he said. "And she acted as if she had done something wrong—something—" Nils' words stopped and he frowned intently as he flicked at a roadside branch with the whip, "—something we would hurt her for. Gail, maybe that's why—I mean, we found that witch quotation. Maybe those other people were like Marnie. Maybe someone thought they were witches and burned them—"

"But witches are evil!" I cried. "What's evil about floating—"

"Anything is evil," said Nils, "if it lies on the other side of the line you draw around what you will accept as good. Some people's lines are awfully narrow."

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"But that's murder!" I said. "To kill—"

"Murder or execution—again, a matter of interpretation!" said Nils. "*We* call it murder, but it could never be proved—"

"Marnie," I suggested. "She saw—"

"Can't talk—or won't," said Nils.

I hated the shallow valley of Grafton's Vow at first glance. For me it was shadowed from one side to the other in spite of the down-flooding sun that made us so grateful for the shade of the over-hanging branches. The road was running between rail fences now as we approached the town. Even the horses seemed jumpy and uneasy as we rattled along.

"Look," I said, "there's a notice or something on that fence post."

Nils pulled up alongside the post and I leaned over to read: "Ex 20:16. That's all it says!"

"Another reference," said Nils. " 'Thou shalt not bear false witness.' This must be a habit with them, putting up memorials on the spot where a law is broken."

"I wonder what happened here." I shivered as we went on.

We were met at a gate by a man with a shotgun in his hands who said, "God have mercy," and directed us to the campgrounds safely separated from town by a palisade kind of log wall. There we were questioned severely by an anxious-faced man, also clutching a shotgun, who peered up at the sky at intervals as though expecting the wrath of heaven at any moment.

"Only one wagon?" he asked.

"Yes," said Nils. "My wife and I and—"

"You have your marriage lines?" came the sharp question.

"Yes," said Nils patiently. "They're packed in the trunk."

"And your Bible is probably packed away, too!" the man accused.

"No," said Nils. "Here it is." He took it from under the seat. The man sniffed and shifted.

"Who's that?" He nodded at the back of Marnie's dark head where she lay silently, sleeping or not, I don't know.

"My niece," Nils said steadily, and I clamped my mouth shut. "She's sick."

"Sick!" The man backed away from the wagon. "What sin did she commit?"

"Nothing catching," said Nils.

"Which way you come?" asked the man.

"Through Millman's Pass," Nils answered, his eyes unwavering on the anxious questioning face. The man paled and clutched his gun tighter, the skin of his face seeming to stretch down tight and then flush loose and sweaty again.

"What—" he began, then he licked dry lips and tried again, "Did you—was there—"

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"Was there what?" asked Nils shortly. "Did we what?"

"Nothing," stammered the man, backing away. "Nothing.

"Gotta see her," he said, coming reluctantly back to the wagon. "Too easy to bear false witness—" Roughly he grabbed the quilt and pulled it back, rolling Marnie's head towards him. I thought he was going to collapse. "That's—that's the one!" he whimpered hoarsely. "How did she get—Where did you—" Then his lips clamped shut. "If you say it's your niece, it's your niece.

"You can stay the night," he said with an effort. "Spring just outside the wall. Otherwise keep to the compound. Remember your prayers. Comport yourself in the fear of God." Then he scuttled away.

"Niece!" I breathed. "Oh, Nils! Shall I write out an Ex. 20:16 for you to nail on the wagon?"

"She'll have to be someone," said Nils. "When we get to Margin, we'll have to explain her somehow. She's named for your sister, so she's our niece. Simple, isn't it?"

"Sounds so," I said. "But Nils, *who* is she? How did that man know—? If those were her people that died back there, where are their wagons? Their belongings? People don't just drop out of the sky—"

"Maybe these Graftonites took the people there to execute them," he suggested, "And confiscated their goods."

"Be more characteristic if they burned the people in the town square," I said shivering, "and their wagons, too."

We made camp. Marnie followed me to the spring. I glanced around, embarrased for her in the nightgown, but no one else was around and darkness was falling. We went through the wall by a little gate and were able for the first time to see the houses of the village. They were very ordinary looking except for the pale flutter of papers posted profusely on everything a nail could hold to. How could they think of anything *but* sinning, with all these ghostly reminders?

While we were dipping the water, a small girl, enveloped in grey calico from slender neck to thin wrists and down to clumsy shoes, came pattering down to the spring, eyeing us as though she expected us to leap upon her with a roar.

"Hello," I said and smiled.

"God have mercy," she answered in a breathless whisper. "Are you right with God?"

"I trust so," I answered, not knowing if the question required an answer.

"She's wearing white," said the child, nodding at Marnie. "Is she dying?"

"No," I said, "but she's been ill. That is her nightgown."

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"Oh!" The child's eyes widened and her hand covered her mouth. "How wicked! To use such a bad word! To be in her—her—to be like that outside the house! In the daytime!" She plopped her heavy bucket into the spring and, dragging it out, staggered away from us, slopping water as she went. She was met halfway up the slope by a grim-faced woman, who set the pail aside, switched the weeping child unmercifully with a heavy willow switch, took a paper from her pocket, impaled it on a nail on a tree, seized the child with one hand and the bucket with the other and plodded back to town.

I looked at the paper. Ex. 20:12. "Well!" I let out an astonished breath. "And she had it already written!" Then I went back to Marnie. Her eyes were big and empty again, the planes of her face sharply sunken.

"Marnie," I said, touching her shoulder. There was no response, no consciousness of me as I led her back to the wagon.

Nils retrieved the bucket of water and we ate a slender, unhappy supper by the glow of our campfire. Marnie ate nothing and sat in a motionless daze until we put her to bed.

"Maybe she's subject to seizures," I suggested.

"It was more likely watching the child being beaten," said Nils. "What had she done?"

"Nothing except to talk to us and be shocked that Marnie should be in her nightgown in public."

"What was the paper the mother posted?" asked Nils.

"Exodus, 20:12," I said. "The child must have disobeyed her mother by carrying on a conversation with us."

After a fitful, restless night, the first thin light of dawn looked wonderful and we broke camp almost before we had shadows separate from the night. Just before we rode away, Nils wrote large and blackly on a piece of paper and fastened it to the wall near our wagon with loud accusing hammer blows. As we drove away, I asked, "What does it say?"

"Exodus, chapter 22, verses 21 through 24," he said. "If they want wrath, let it fall on them!"

I was too unhappy and worn out to pursue the matter. I only knew it must be another Shalt Not and was thankful that I had been led by my parents through the Rejoice and Love passages instead of into the darkness.

Half an hour later, we heard the clatter of hooves behind us and, looking back, saw someone riding towards us, waving an arm urgently. Nils pulled up and laid his hand on his rifle. We waited.

It was the anxious man who had directed us to the campsite. He had Nils' paper clutched in his hand. At first he couldn't get his

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words out, then he said, "Drive on! Don't stop! They might be coming after me!" He gulped and wiped his nervous forehead. Nils slapped the reins and we moved off down the road. "Y—you left this—" he jerked the paper towards us. " 'Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him—' " the words came in gasps. " 'Ye shalt not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any wise, I will surely hear their cry and my wrath shall wax hot—' " He sagged in the saddle, struggling for breath. "This is exactly what I told them," he said finally. "I showed it to them—the very next verses—but they couldn't see past 22:18. They—they went anyway. That Archibold told them about the people. He said they did things only witches could do. I had to go along. Oh, God have mercy! And help them tie them and watch them set the shed afire!"

"Who were they?" asked Nils.

"I don't know." The man sucked air noisily. "Archibold said he saw them flying up in the trees and laughing. He said they floated rocks around and started to build a house with them. He said they—they walked on the water and didn't fall in. He said one of them held a piece of wood up in the air and it caught on fire and other wood came and made a pile on the ground and that piece went down and lighted the rest." The man wiped his face again. "They *must* have been witches! Or else how could they do such things! We caught them. They were sleeping. They fluttered up like birds. I caught that little girl you've got there, only her hair was long then. We tied them up. I didn't want to!" Tears jerked out of his eyes. "I didn't put any knots in my rope and after the roof caved in, the little girl flew out all on fire and hid in the dark! I didn't know the Graftonites were like that! I only came last year. They—they *tell* you exactly what to do to be saved. You don't have to think or worry or wonder—" He rubbed his coat sleeve across his face. "Now all my life I'll see the shed burning. What about the others?"

"We buried them," I said shortly. "The charred remains of them."

"God have mercy!" he whispered.

"Where did the people come from?" asked Nils. "Where are their wagons?"

"There weren't any," said the man. "Archibold says they came in a flash of lightning and a thunder clap out of a clear sky—not a cloud anywhere. He waited and watched them three days before he came and told us. Wouldn't *you* think they were witches?" He wiped his face again and glanced back down the road. "They might follow me. Don't tell them. Don't say I told." He gathered up the reins, his face drawn and anxious, and spurred his horse into a gal-

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lop, cutting away from the road, across the flat. But before the hurried hoof beats were muffled by distance, he whirled around and galloped back.

"But!" he gasped, back by our wagon side. "She must be a witch! She should be dead. You are compromising with evil—"

"Shall I drag her out so you can finish burning her here and now?" snapped Nils. "So you can watch her sizzle in her sin!"

"Don't!" The man doubled across the saddle horn in an agony of indecision. " 'No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom.' What if they're right? What if the Devil is tempting me? Lead me not into temptation! Maybe it's not too late! Maybe if I confess!" And he tore back down the road towards Grafton's Vow faster than he had come.

"Well!" I drew a deep breath. "What scripture would you quote for that?"

"I'm wondering," said Nils. "This Archibold. I wonder if he was in his right mind—"

" 'They fluttered up like birds,' " I reminded him. "And Marnie was floating."

"But floating rocks and making fire and coming in a flash of lightning out of a clear sky!" Nils protested.

"Maybe it was some kind of a balloon," I suggested. "Maybe it exploded. Maybe Marnie *doesn't* speak English. If the balloon sailed a long way—"

"It couldn't sail too far," said Nils. "The gas cools and it would come down. But how else could they come through the air?"

I felt a movement behind me and turned. Marnie was sitting up on the pallet. But what a different Marnie! It was as though her ears had been upstopped or a window had opened into her mind. There was an eager listening look on her tilted face. There was light in her eyes and the possibility of smiles around her mouth. She looked at me. "Through the air!" she said.

"Nils! I cried. "Did you hear that! How did you come through the air, Marnie?"

She smiled apologetically and fingered the collar of the garment she wore and said, "Gown."

"Yes, gown," I said, settling for a word when I wanted a volume. Then I thought, *Can I reach the bread, box?* Marnie's bright eyes left my face and she rummaged among the boxes and bundles. With a pleased little sound, she came up with a piece of bread. "Bread," she said. "Bread!" And it floated through the air into my astonished hands.

"Well!" said Nils. "Communication has begun!" Then he sobered. "And we have a child, apparently. From what that man said, there is no one left to be responsible for her. She seems to be ours."

When we stopped at noon for

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dinner, we were tired. More from endless speculation than from the journey. There had been no signs of pursuit and Marnie had subsided onto the pallet again, eyes closed.

We camped by a small creek and I had Nils get my trunk out before he cared for the animals. I opened the trunk with Marnie close beside me, watching my every move. I had packed an old skirt and shirtwaist on the top till so they would be ready for housecleaning and settling-in when we arrived at Margin. I held the skirt up to Marnie. It was too big and too long, but it would do with the help of a few strategic pins and by fastening the skirt up almost under her arms. Immediately, to my surprise and discomfort, Marnie skinned the nightgown off over her head in one motion and stood arrow-slim and straight, dressed only in that undergarment of hers. I glanced around quickly to see where Nils was and urged the skirt and blouse on Marnie. She glanced around too, puzzled, and slipped the clothing on, holding the skirt up on both sides. I showed her the buttons and hooks and eyes and, between the two of us and four pins, we got her put together.

When Nils came to the dinner tarp, he was confronted by Marnie, all dressed even to my slippers.

"Well!" he said. "A fine young lady we have! It's too bad we had to cut her hair."

"We can pretend she's just recovering from typhoid," I said, smiling. But the light had gone out of Marnie's face as if she knew what we were saying. She ran her fingers through her short-cropped curls, her eyes on my heavy braids I let swing free, Indian fashion, traveling as we were, alone and unobserved.

"Don't you mind," I said, hugging her in one arm. "It'll grow again."

She lifted one of my braids and looked at me. "Hair," I said.

"Hair," she said and stretched out a curl from her own head. "Curl."

What a wonderful feeling it was to top out on the flat above Margin and to know we were almost home. Home! As I wound my braids around my head in a more seemly fashion, I looked back at the boxes and bundles in the wagon. With these and very little else we must make a home out here in the middle of nowhere. Well, with Nils, it would suffice.

The sound of our wheels down the grade into town brought out eager, curious people from the scattering of houses and scanty town buildings that made up Margin. Margin clung to the side of a hill—that is, it was in the rounded embrace of the hill on three sides. On the other side, hundreds and hundreds of miles of territory lost them-

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selves finally in the remote blueness of distance. It was a place where you could breathe free and unhampered and yet still feel the protectiveness of the everlasting hills. We were escorted happily to our house at the other end of town by a growing crowd of people. Marnie had fallen silent and withdrawn again, her eyes wide and wondering, her hand clutching the edge of the seat with white-knuckled intensity as she tried to lose herself between Nils and me.

Well, the first few days in a new place are always uncomfortable and confused. All the settling-in and the worry about whether Marnie would go floating off like a balloon or send something floating through the air as she had the bread combined to wear me to a frazzle. Fortunately, Marnie was very shy of anyone but us, so painfully so that as soon as the gown was washed and clean again and we borrowed a cot, I put Marnie into both of them, and she lay in a sort of doze all day long, gone to some far place I couldn't even guess at.

Of course we had to explain her. There had been no mention of her when we arranged to come, and she had no clothes and I didn't have enough to cover both of us decently. So I listened to myself spin the most outrageous stories to Mrs. Wardlow. Her husband was the school master-lay preacher and every other function of a learned man in a frontier settlement. She was the unofficial news-spreader and guardian of public morals.

"Marnie is our niece," I said. "She's my younger sister's girl. She is just recovering from typhoid and—and brain fever."

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Wardlow. "Both at once?"

"No," I said, warming to my task. "She was weakened by the typhoid and went into a brain fever. She lost her hair from all the fever. We thought we were going to lose her, too." It didn't take play-acting to shiver, as, unbidden into my mind, came the vision of the smoke pluming slowly up—

"My sister sent her with us, hoping that the climate out here will keep Marnie from developing a consumption. She hopes, too, that I can help the child learn to talk again."

"I've heard of people having to learn to walk again after typhoid, but not to talk—"

"The technical name for the affliction is aphasia," I said glibly. "Remember the brain fever. She had just begun to make some progress in talking, but the trip has set her back."

"She—she isn't—unbalanced, is she?" whispered Mrs. Wardlow piercingly.

"Of course not!" I said indignantly. "And, please! She can hear perfectly."

"Oh," said Mrs. Wardlow, reddening. "Of course. I didn't mean to offend. When she is recovered

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enough, Mr. Wardlow would be pleased to set her lessons for her until she can come to school."

"Thank you," I said. "That would be very kind of him." Then I changed the subject by introducing tea.

After she left, I sat down by Marnie, whose eyes brightened for my solitary presence.

"Marnie," I said, "I don't know how much you understand of what I say, but you are my niece. You must call me Aunt Gail and Nils, Uncle Nils. You have been sick. You are having to learn to speak all over again." Her eyes had been watching me attentively, but not one flick of understanding answered me. I sighed heavily and turned away. Marnie's hand caught my arm. She held me, as she lay, eyes closed. Finally I made a movement as if to free myself, and she opened her eyes and smiled.

"Aunt Gail, I have been sick. My hair is gone. I want bread!" she recited carefully.

"Oh Marnie!" I cried, hugging her to me in delight. "Bless you! You *are* learning to talk!" I hugged my face into the top of her curls then I let her go. "As to bread, I mixed a batch this morning. It'll be in the oven as soon as it rises again. There's nothing like the smell of baking bread to make a place seem like home."

As soon as Marnie was strong enough, I began teaching her the necessary household skills and found it most disconcerting to see her holding a broom gingerly, not knowing, literally, which end to use, or what to do with it. Anybody knows what a needle and thread is for! But Marnie looked upon them as if they were baffling wonders from another world. She watched the needle swing back and forth sliding down the thread until it fell to the floor because she didn't know enough to put a knot in the end.

She learned to talk, but very slowly at first. She had to struggle and wait for words. I asked her about it one day. Her slow answer came. "I don't know your language," she said. "I have to change the words to my language to see what they say, then change them again to be in your language." She sighed. "It's so slow! But soon I will be able to take words from your mind and not have to change them."

I blinked, not quite sure I wanted anything taken from my mind by anyone!

The people of Margin had sort of adopted Marnie and were very pleased with her progress. Even the young ones learned to wait for her slow responses. She found it more comfortable to play with the younger children because they didn't require such a high performance in the matter of words, and because their play was with fundamental things of the house and the community, translated into

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the simplest forms and acted out in endless repetition.

I found out, to my discomfort, a little of how Marnie was able to get along so well with the small ones—the day Merwin Wardlow came roaring to me in seven-year-old indignation.

"Marnie and that old sister of mine won't let me play!" he tattled wrathfully.

"Oh, I'm sure they will if you play nicely," I said, shifting my crochet hook as I hurried with the edging of Marnie's new petticoat.

"They won't neither!" And he prepared to bellow again. His bellow rivaled the six o'clock closing whistle at the mine, so I sighed and laying my word down, took him out to the children's play-place under the aspens.

Marnie was playing with five-year-old Tessie Wardlow. They were engrossed in building a playhouse. They had already outlined the various rooms with rocks and were now furnishing them with sticks and stones, shingles, old cans and bottles and remnants of broken dishes. Marnie was arranging flowers in a broken vase she had propped between two rocks. Tessie was busily bringing her flowers and sprays of leaves. And not one single word was being exchanged! Tessie watched Marnie, then trotted off to get another flower. Before she could pick the one she intended, she stopped, her hand actually on the flower, glanced at Marnie's busy back, left that flower and, picking another, trotted happily back with it.

"Marnie," I called, and blinked to feel a whisp of something say *Yes?* inside my mind. "Marnie I called again. Marnie jumped and turned her face to me. "Yes, Aunt Gail," she said carefully.

"Merwin says you won't let him play."

"Oh, he's telling stories!" cried Tessie indignantly. "He won't do anything Marnie says and she's the boss today."

"She don't tell me nothing to do!" yelled Merwin, betraying in his indignation his father's careful grammar.

"She does so!" Tessie stamped her foot. "She tells you just as much as she tells me! And you don't do it!"

I was saved from having to arbitrate between the warring two by Mrs. Wardlow's calling them in to supper. Relieved, I sank down on the southwest corner of the parlor —a sizeable moss-grown rock. Marnie sat down on the ground beside me.

"Marnie," I said. "How did Tessie know what flowers to bring you?"

"I told her," said Marnie, surprised. "They said I was boss today. Merwin just wouldn't play."

"Did you tell him things to do?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Marnie. "But he didn't do nothing."

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"Did nothing," I corrected.

"Did nothing," she echoed.

"The last flower Tessie brought," I went on. "Did you ask for that special one?"

"Yes," said Marnie. "She started to pick the one with bad petals on one side."

"Marnie," I said patiently. "I was here and I didn't hear a word. Did you *talk* to Tessie?"

"Oh, yes," said Marnie.

"With words? Out loud?" I pursued.

"I think—" Marnie started, then she sighed and sagged against my knees, tracing a curve in the dirt with her forefinger. "I guess not. It is so much more easy ('Easier,' I corrected.) easier to catch her thoughts before they are words. I can tell Tessie without words. But Merwin—I guess he needs words."

"Marnie," I said, taking reluctant steps into the wilderness of my ignorance of what to do with a child who found 'no words more easy', "you must always use words. It might seem easier to you the—the other way, but you *must* speak. You see, most people don't understand *not* using words. When people don't understand, they get frightened. When they are frightened, they get angry. And when they get angry, they—they have to hurt."

I sat quietly watching Marnie manipulate my words, frame a reply and make it into words for her stricken, unhappy lips.

"Then it was because they didn't understand, that they killed us," she said. "They made the fire."

"Yes," I said. "Exactly."

"Marnie," I went on, feeling that I was prying, but needing to know. "You have never cried for the people who died in the fire. You were sad, but—weren't they your own people?"

"Yes," said Marnie, after an interval. "My father, my mother and my brother—" She firmed her lips and swallowed. "And a neighbor of ours. One brother was Called in the skies when our ship broke and my little sister's life-slip didn't come with ours."

And I saw them! Vividly, I saw them all as she named them. The father, I noticed before his living, smiling image faded from my mind, had thick dark curls like Marnie's. The neighbor was a plump little woman.

"But," I blinked, "don't you grieve for them? Aren't you sad because they are dead?"

"I am sad because they aren't with me," said Marnie slowly. "But I do not grieve that the Power Called them back to the Presence. Their bodies were so hurt and broken." She swallowed again. "My days are not finished yet, but no matter how long until I am Called, my people will come to meet me. They will laugh and run to me when I arrive and I—" She leaned against my skirt, averting her face. After a moment, she

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lifted her chin and said, "I *am* sad to be here without them, but my biggest sorrow is not knowing where my little sister is, or whether Timmy has been Called. We were two-ing, Timmy and I." Her hand closed over the hem of my skirt. "But, praise the Presence, I have you and Uncle Nils, who do not hurt just because you don't understand."

"But where on Earth—" I began.

"Is this called Earth?" Marnie looked about her. "Is Earth the place we came to?"

"The whole world is Earth," I said. "Everything—as far as you can see—as far as you can go. You came to this Territory—"

"Earth—" Marnie was musing. "So this refuge in the sky is called Earth!" She scrambled to her feet. "I'm sorry I troubled you, Aunt Gail," she said. "Here, this is to promise not to be un-Earth—" She snatched up the last flower she had put in the playhouse vase and pushed it into my hands. "I will set the table for supper," she called back to me as she hurried to the house. "This time forks at each place—not in a row down the middle."

I sighed and twirled the flower in my fingers. Then I laughed helplessly. The flower that had so prosaically grown on, and had been plucked from our hillside, was glowing with a deep radiance, its burning gold center flicking the shadows of the petals across my fingers, and all the petals tinkled softly from the dewdrop clear bits of light that were finely pendant along the edges of them. Not un-Earth! But when I showed Nils the flower that evening as I retold our day, the flower was just a flower again, limp and withering.

"Either you or Marnie has a wonderful imagination," Nils said.

"Then it's Marnie," I replied. "I could never in a million years think up anything like the things she said. Only, Nils, how can we be sure it isn't true?"

"That what isn't true?" he asked. "What do you think she has told you?"

"Why—why—" I groped, "that she can read minds, Tessie's anyway. And that this is a strange world to her. And—and—"

"If this is the way she wants to make the loss of her family bearable, let her. It's better than hysterics or meloncholia. Besides, it's more exciting, isn't it?" Nils laughed.

That reaction wasn't much help in soothing my imagination! But *he* didn't have to spend his days wrestling hand to hand with Marnie and her ways. He hadn't had to insist that Marnie learn to make the beds by hand instead of floating the covers into place—nor insist that young ladies wear shoes in preference to drifting barefoot a few inches above the sharp gravel and beds of stickers in the back

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yard. And he didn't have to persuade her that, no matter how dark the moonless night, one doesn't cut out paper flowers and set them to blooming like little candles around the corners of the rooms. Nils had been to the county seat *that weekend*. I don't know where she was from, but this *was* a New World to her and whatever one she was native to, I had no memory of reading about or of seeing on a globe.

When Marnie started taking classes in Mr. Wardlow's one room school, she finally began to make friends with the few children her age in Margin. Guessing at her age, she seemed to be somewhere in her teens. Among her friends were Kenny, the son of the mine foreman, and Loolie, the daughter of the boarding-house cook. The three of them ranged the hills together, and Marnie picked up a large vocabulary from them and became a little wiser in the ways of behaving unexceptionally. She startled them a time or two by doing impossible things, but they reacted with anger and withdrawal which she had to wait out more or less patiently before being accepted back into their companionship. One doesn't forget again very quickly under such circumstances.

During this time, her hair grew and she grew, too, so much so that she finally had to give up the undergarment she had worn when we found her. She sighed as she laid it aside, tucking it into the bottom dresser drawer. "At Home," she said, "there would be a ceremony and a pledging. All of us girls would know that our adult responsibilities were almost upon us—" Somehow, she seemed less different, less, well I suppose, alien, after that day.

It wasn't very long after this that Marnie began to stop suddenly in the middle of a sentence and listen intently, or clatter down the plates she was patterning on the supper table and hurry to the window. I watched her anxiously for a while, wondering if she was sickening for something, then, one night, after I blew out the lamp, I thought I heard something moving in the other room. I went in barefootedly quiet. Marnie was at the window.

"Marnie?" Her shadowy figure turned to me. "What's troubling you?" I stood close beside her and looked out at the moonlight-flooded emptiness of hills around the house.

"Something is out there," she said. "Something scared and bad —frightened and evil—" she took the more adult words from my mind. I was pleased that being conscious of her doing this didn't frighten me any more the way it did the first few times. "It goes around the house and around the house and is afraid to come."

"Perhaps an animal," I suggested.

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"Perhaps," she conceded, turning away from the window. "I don't know your world. An animal who walks upright and sobs, 'God have mercy!'?"

Which incident was startling in itself, but doubly so when Nils said casually next day as he helped himself to mashed potatoes at the dinner table, "Guess who I saw today. They say he's been around a week or so." He flooded his plate with brown meat gravy. "Our friend of the double mind."

"Double mind?" I blinked uncomprehendingly.

"Yes." Nils reached for a slice of bread. "To burn or not to burn, that is the question—"

"Oh!" I felt a quiver up my arms. "You mean the man at Grafton's Vow. What was his name anyway?"

"He never said, did he?" Nils' fork paused in mid-air as the thought caught him.

"Derwent," said Marnie shortly, her lips pressing to a narrow line. "Caleb Derwent, God have mercy."

"How do you know?" I asked. "Did he tell you?"

"No," she said. "I took it from him to remember him with gratitude." She pushed away from the table, her eyes widening. "That's it—that's the frightened evil that walks around the house at night! And passes by during the day! But he saved me from the fire! Why does he come now?"

"She's been feeling that something evil is lurking outside," I explained to Nils' questioning look.

"Hmm," he said. "The two minds. Marnie, if ever he—"

"May I go?" Marnie stood up. "I'm sorry. I can't eat when I think of someone repenting of good." And she was gone, the kitchen door clicking behind her.

"And she's right," said Nils, resuming his dinner. "He slithered around a stack of nail kegs at the store and muttered to me about still compromising with evil, harboring a known witch. I sort of pinned him in the corner until he told me he had finally—after all this time—confessed his sin of omission to his superiors at Grafton's Vow and they've excommunicated him until he redeems himself—" Nils stared at me, listening to his own words. "Gail! You don't suppose he has any mad idea about taking her back to Grafton's Vow, do you!"

"Or *killing* her!" I cried, clattering my chair back from the table. "Marnie!" Then I subsided with an attempt at a smile. "But she's witch enough to sense his being around," I said. "He won't be able to take her by surprise."

"Sensing or not," Nils said, eating hastily, "next time I get within reach of this Derwent person, I'm going to persuade him that he'll be healthier elsewhere."

In the days that followed, we got used to seeing half of Derwent's face peering around a building, or

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a pale slice of his face appearing through bushes or branches, but he seemed to take out his hostility in watching Marnie from a safe distance, and we decided to let things ride—watchfully.

Then one evening Marnie shot through the back door and, shutting it, leaned against it, panting.

"Marnie," I chided. "I didn't hear your steps on the porch. You *must* remember—"

"I—I'm sorry, Aunt Gail," she said, "but I had to hurry. Aunt Gail, I have a trouble!" She was actually shaking.

"What have you done now to upset Kenny and Loolie?" I asked, smiling.

"Not—not that," she said. "Oh, Aunt Gail! He's down in the shaft and I can't get him up. I know the inanimate lift, but he's not inanimate—"

"Marnie, sit down," I said, sobering. "Calm down and tell me what's wrong."

She sat, if that tense tentative conforming to a chair could be called sitting.

"I was out at East Shaft," she said. "My people are Identifiers, some of them are, anyway—my family is, especially—I mean—" she gulped and let loose all over. I could almost see the tension drain out of her, but it came flooding back as soon as she started talking again. "Identifiers can locate metals and minerals. I felt a pretty piece of chrysocolla down in the shaft and I wanted to get it for you for your collection. I climbed through the fence—oh, I know I shouldn't have, but I did—and I was checking to see how far down in the shaft the mineral was when —when I looked up and he was there!" She clasped her hands. "He said, 'Evil must die. I can't go back because you're not dead. I let you out of a little fire in this life, so I'll burn forever. "He who endures to the end—" ' Then he pushed me into the shaft—"

"Into the—" I gasped.

"Of course, I didn't fall," she hastened. "I just lifted to the other side out the shaft out of reach, but —but he had pushed me so hard that he—*he* fell!"

"He fell!" I started up in horror. "He fell? Child, that's hundreds of feet down onto rocks and water—"

"I—I caught him before he fell all the way," said Marnie, apologetically. "But I had to do it our way. I stopped his falling—only —only he's just staying there! In the air! In the shaft! I know the inanimate lift, but he's alive. And I—don't—know—how—to—get —him—up!" She burst into tears. "And if I let him go, he will fall to death. And if I leave him there, he'll bob up and down and up and —I *can't* leave him there!" She flung herself against me, wailing. It was the first time she'd ever let go like that.

Nils had come in at the tail-end of her explanation and I filled him

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in between my muttered comforting of the top of Marnie's head. He went to the shed and came back with a coil of rope.

"With a reasonable amount of luck, no one will see us," he said. "It's a good thing that we're out here by ourselves."

Evening was all around us as we climbed the slope behind the house. The sky was high and a clear, transparent blue, shading to apricot, with a metallic orange backing the surrounding hills. One star was out, high above the evening-hazy immensity of distance beyond Margin. We panted up the hill to East Shaft. It was the one dangerous abandoned shaft among all the shallow prospect holes that dotted the hills around us. It had been fenced with barbwire and was forbidden territory to the children of Margin—including Marnie. Nils held down one strand of the barbwire with his foot and lifted the one above it. Marnie slithered through and I scrambled through, snatching the ruffle of my petticoat free from where it had caught on the lower barbs.

We lay down on the rocky ground and edged up to the brink of the shaft. It was darker than the inside of a hat.

"Derwent!" Nils' voice echoed eerily down past the tangle of vegetation clinging to the upper reaches of the shaft.

"Here I am, Lord." The voice rolled up flatly, drained of emotion. "Death caught me in the midst of my sin. Cast me into the fire—the ever-lasting fire I traded a piddlin' little shed fire for. Kids—dime a dozen! I sold my soul for a scared face. Here I am, Lord. Cast me into the fire."

Nils made a sound. If what I was feeling was any indication, a deep sickness was tightening his throat. "Derwent!" he called again, "I'm letting down a rope. Put the loop around your waist so we can pull you up!" He paid the rope out across a timber that slanted over the shaft. Down it went into the darkness—and hung swaying slightly.

"Derwent!" Nils shouted. "Caleb Derwent! Get hold of that rope!"

"Here I am, Lord," came the flat voice again, much closer this time. "Death caught me in the midst of my sin—"

"Marnie," Nils said over the mindless mechanical reiteration that was now receeding below. "Can you do anything?"

"May I?" she asked. "May I, Uncle Nils?"

"Of course," said Nils. "There's no one here to be offended. Here, take hold of the rope and—and go down along it so we'll know where you are."

So Marnie stepped lightly into the nothingness of the shaft and, hand circling the rope, sank down into the darkness. Nils mopped the sweat from his forehead with his forearm. "No weight," he muttered

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"Not an ounce of weight on the rope!"

Then there was a shriek and a threshing below us. "No! No!" bellowed Derwent, "I repent! I repent! Don't shove me down into everlasting—!" His words broke off and the rope jerked.

"Marnie!" I cried. "What—what—"

"He's—his eyes turned up and his mouth went open and he doesn't talk," she called up fearfully from the blackness. "I can't find his thoughts—"

"Fainted!" said Nils. Then he called. "It's all right, Marnie. He's only unconscious from fright. Put the rope around him."

So we drew him up from the shaft. Once the rope snatched out of our hands for several inches, but he didn't fall! The rope slacked, but he didn't fall! Marnie's anxious face came into sight beside his bowed head. "I can hold him from falling," she said. But you must do all the pulling. I can't lift him."

Then we had him out on the ground, lying flat, but in the brief interval that Nils used to straighten him out, he drifted up from the ground about four inches. Marnie pressed him back.

"He—he isn't fastened to the Earth with all the fastenings. I loosed some when I stopped his fall. The shaft helped hold him. But now I—I've got to fasten them all back again. I didn't learn that part very well at home. Not for other people. Everyone can do it for himself. I got so scared when he fell that I forgot all I knew. But I couldn't have done it with him still in the shaft anyway. He would have fallen." She looked around in the deepening dusk. "I need a source of light—"

Light? We looked around us. The only lights in sight were the one star and a pin prick or so in the shadows of the flat below us.

"A lantern?" asked Nils.

"No," said Marnie. "Moonlight or sunlight or enough star light. It takes light to platt—" She shrugged with her open hands.

"The moon is just past full," said Nils. "It'll be up soon—"

So we crouched there on boulders, rocks and pebbles, holding Derwent down, waiting for the moonrise to become an ingredient in fastening him to the Earth again. I felt an inappropriate bubble of laughter shaking my frightened shoulders. What a story to tell to my grandchildren! If I lived through this ever to have any!

Finally the moon came, a sudden flood through the transparency of the evening air. Marnie took a deep breath, her face very white in the moonlight. "It's—it's frightening!" she said. "Platting with moonlight is an adult activity. Any child can platt with sunlight, but," she shivered, "only the Old Ones dare use moonlight and sunlight together! I—I think I can handle the moonlight. I hope!"

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She lifted her two cupped hands. They quickly filled with a double handful of moonlight. The light flowed and wound across her palms and between her fingers, flickering live and lovely. Then she was weaving the living light into an intricate design that moved and changed and grew until it hid her arms to the elbows and cast light up into her intent face. One curve of it touched me. It was like nothing I'd ever felt before, so I jerked away from it. But, fascinated, I reached for it again. A gasp from Marnie stopped my hand.

"It's too big," she gasped. "It's too powerful! I—I don't know enough to control—" Her fingers flicked and the intricate light enveloped Derwent from head to foot. Then there was a jarring and a shifting. The slopes around us suddenly became unstable and almost fluid. There was a grinding and a rumbling. Rocks clattered down the slope beyond us and the lip of East Shaft crumpled. The ground dimpled in around where the shaft had been. A little puff of dust rose from the spot and drifted slowly away in the cooling night air. We sorted ourselves out from where we had tumbled, clutched in each other's arms. Marnie looked down at the completely relaxed Derwent. "It got too big, too fast," she apologized. "I'm afraid it spoiled the shaft."

Nils and I exchanged glances and we both smiled weakly. "It's all right, Marnie," I said. "It doesn't matter. Is he all right now?"

"Yes," said Marnie. "His thoughts are coming back."

"Everything's fine," muttered Nils to me. "But what do you suppose that little earth-shaking has done to the mine?"

My eyes widened and I felt my hands tighten. What, indeed, *had* it done to the mine?

Derwent's thoughts came back enough that he left us the next day, sagging in his saddle, moving only because his horse did, headed for nowhere—just away—away from Margin, from Grafton's Vow, from Marnie. We watched him go, Marnie's face troubled.

"He is so confused," she said. "If only I were a Sorter. I could help his mind—"

"He tried to *kill* you!" I burst out, impatient with her compassion.

"He thought he would never be able to come into the Presence because of me," she said quickly. "What might I have done if I had believed that of him?"

So Derwent was gone—and so was the mine, irretrievably. The shaft, laboriously drilled and blasted through solid rock, the radiating drifts, hardly needing timbering to support them because of the composition of the rock—all had splintered and collapsed.

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From the mine entrance, crushed to a cabin-sized cave, you could hear the murmur of waters that had broken through into, and drowned, the wreckage of the mine. The second day a trickle of water began a pool in the entrance. The third day the stream began to run down the slope towards town. It was soaked up almost immediately by the bone-dry ground, but the muddy wetness spread farther and farther and a small channel began to etch itself down the hill.

It doesn't take long for a town to die. The workmen milled around at the mine entrance for a day or two, murmuring of earthquakes and other awesome dispensations from the hand of God, hardly believing that they weren't at work. It was like a death, that had chopped off things abruptly instead of letting them grow or decrease gradually. Then the first of the families left, their goodbys brief and unemotional to hide the sorrow and worry in their eyes. Then others followed, either leaving their shacks behind them to fall into eventual ruin, or else their houses moved off down the road like shingled turtles, leaving behind them only the concrete foundation blocks.

We, of course, stayed to the last, Nils paying the men off, making arrangments about what was left of the mining equipment, taking care of all the details attendant on the last rites of his career that had started so hopefully here in Margin. But, finally, we would have been packing, too, except for one thing. Marnie was missing.

She had been horrified when she found what had happened to the mine. She was too crushed to cry when Loolie and Kenny and the Wardlows came to say goodby. We didn't know what to say to her or how to comfort her. Finally, late one evening, I found her sitting, hunched on her cot, her face wet with tears.

"It's all right, Marnie," I said. "We won't go hungry. Nils will always find a way to—"

"I'm not crying for the mine," said Marnie and I felt an illogical stab of resentment that she *wasn't*. "It is a year," she went on. "Just a year."

"A year?" Then remembrance flooded in. A year since the sullen smoke plumed up from the burning shed, since I felt the damp curling of freshly cut hair under my fingers—since Nils grimly dug the multiple grave. "But it should be a little easier now," I said.

"It's only that on the Home it would have been Festival time—time to bring our flowers and lift into the skies and sing to remember all who had been Called during the year. We kept Festival only three days before the angry ones came and killed us." She wiped her cheeks with the backs of her hands. "That was a difficult Festival because we were so separated by the

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Crossing. We didn't know how many of us were echoing our songs from Otherside."

"I'm not sure I understand," I said. "But go on—cry for your dead. It will ease you."

"I am not crying for those who have been Called," said Marnie. "They are in the Presence and need no tears. I am crying for the ones—if there are any—who are alive on this Earth we found. I am crying because—Oh, Aunt Gail!" She clung to me. "What if I'm the only one who was not Called? The only one."

I patted her shaking shoulders, wishing I could comfort her.

"There was Timmy," she sniffed and accepted the handkerchief I gave her. "He—he was in our ship. Only at the last moment before Lift Off was there room for him to come with us. But when the ship melted and broke and we each had to get into our life-slips, we scattered like the baby quail Kenny showed me the other day. And only a few life-slips managed to stay together. Oh, I wish I knew!" She closed her wet eyes, her trembling chin lifting. "If only I knew whether or not Timmy is in the Presence!"

I did all that I could to comfort her. My all was just being there.

"I keep silent Festival tonight," she said finally. "Trusting in the Power—"

"This is a solemn night for us, too," I said. "We will start packing tomorrow. Nils thinks he can find a job nearer the Valley—" I sighed. "This would have been such a nice place to watch grow up. All it lacked was a running stream, and now we're getting that. Oh, well—such is life in the wild and woolly west!"

And the next morning, she was gone. On her pillow was a piece of paper that merely said, "Wait."

What could we do? Where could we look? Footprints were impossible on the rocky slopes. And for a Marnie, there could well be *no* footprints at all, even if the surroundings were pure sand. I looked helplessly at Nils.

"Three days," he said, tightly angry. "The traditional three days before a funeral. If she isn't back by then, we leave."

By the end of the second day of waiting in the echo-less ghostiness of the dead town, I had tears enough dammed up in me to rival the new little stream that was cutting deeper and deeper into its channel. Nils was up at the mine entrance watching the waters gush out from where they had oozed at first. I was hunched over the stream where it made the corner by the empty foundation blocks of the mine office, when I heard—or felt—or perceived—a presence. My innards lurched and I turned cautiously. It was Marnie.

"Where have you been?" I asked flatly.

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"Looking for another mine," she said matter-of-factly.

"Another mine?" My shaking hands pulled her down to me and we wordlessly hugged the breath out of each other. Then I let her go.

"I spoiled the other one," she went on as though uninterrupted. "I have found another, but I'm not sure you will want it."

"Another? Not want it?" My mind wasn't functioning on a very high level, as I stood up and screamed, "Nils!"

His figure popped out from behind a boulder and, after hesitating long enough to see there were two of us, he made it down the slope in massive leaps and stood panting, looking at Marnie. Then he was hugging the breath out of her and I was weeping over the two of them, finding my tears considerably fewer than I had thought. We finally all shared my apron to dry our faces and sat, happily shaken, on the edge of our front porch, our feet dangling.

"It's over on the other side of the flat," said Marnie. "In a little canyon there. It's close enough so Margin can grow again here in the same place, only now with a running stream."

"But a new mine! What do you know about mining?" asked Nils, hope, against his better judgment, lightening his face.

"Nothing," admitted Marnie. "But I *can* identify and I took these—" She held out her hands, "A penny for copper. Your little locket," she nodded at me apologetically "for gold. A dollar—" she turned it on her palm, "for silver. By the Identity of these I can find other metals like them. Copper—there is not as much as in the old mine, but there is *some* in the new one. There is quite a bit of gold. It feels like much more than in the old mine, and," she faltered, "I'm sorry, but mostly there is only silver. Much, much more than copper. Maybe if I looked farther —"

"But Marnie," I cried, "silver is better! Silver is better!"

"Are you serious?" asked Nils, the planes of his face stark and boney in the sunlight. "Do you really think you have found a possible mine?"

"I don't know about mines," repeated Marnie. "But I know these metals are there. I can feel them tangling all over in the mountainside and up and down as the ground goes. Much of it is mixed with other matter, but it's like the ore they used to send out of Margin in the wagons with the high wheels. Only some of it is penny and locket and dollar feeling. I didn't know it could come that way in the ground."

"Native silver," I murmured. "Native copper and gold."

"I—I could try to open the hill for you so you could see," suggested Marnie timidly to Nils' still face.

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"No," I said hastily. "No, Marnie. Nils, couldn't we at least take a look?"

So we went, squeezing our way through the underbrush and through a narrow entrance into a box canyon beyond the far side of the flat. Pausing to catch my breath, almost pinned between two towering slabs of tawny orange granite, I glanced up to the segment of blue sky overhead. A white cloud edged into sight and suddenly the movement wasn't in the cloud, but in the mountain of granite. It reeled and leaned and seemed to be toppling. I snatched my eyes away from the sky with a gasp and wiggled on through, following Marnie and followed by Nils.

Nils looked around the canyon wonderingly. "Didn't even know this was here," he said. "No one's filed on this area. It's our—if it's worth filing on. Our own mine—"

Marnie knelt at the base of the cliff that formed one side of the canyon. "Here is the most," she said, rubbing her hand over the crumbling stone. "It is all through the mountain, but there is some silver very close here." She looked up at Nils and read his skepticism.

"Well," she sighed. "Well—" And she sank down with the pool of her skirts around her on the sandy ground. She clasped her hands and stared down at them. I could see her shoulders tighten and felt something move—or change—or begin. Then, about shoulder high on the face of the rock wall, there was a coloring and a crumbling. Then a thin, bright trickle came from the rock and ran molten down to the sand, spreading flower-like into a palm sized disk of pure silver!

"There," said Marnie, her shoulders relaxing. "That was close to the outside—"

"Nils!" I cried. "Look!" and snatching up the still-hot metallic blossom, I dropped it again, the bright blood flowing across the ball of my thumb from the gashing of the sharp silver edge.

It doesn't take long for a town to grow. Not if there's a productive mine and an ideal flat for straight, wide business streets. And hills and trees and a running stream for residental areas. The three of us watch with delighted wonder the miracle of Margin growing and expanding. Only occasionally does Marnie stand at the window in the dark and wonder if she is the only one—the last one—of her People left upon Earth. And only occasionally do I look at her and wonder where on Earth—or off it—did this casual miracle, this angel unawares, come from.

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As far as we know, brainwashing is still a pretty crude business. They wash and they wash, but they can't seem to get the thing clean. *But what* would *happen if literally a man's mind could be changed as easily as a phonograph record? In the short chiller below, Henry Slesar gives us one frightening answer.*

I REMEMBER OBLIVION

by Henry Slesar

I remember you, little duck, Father laughing as I toddled after you on the lawn, Mother chuckling in the cottage doorway coming out with tray of lemonade and cookies crunchy sweet and powdered cinnamon. Sun warm and roses rambling. Sitting in Father's lap his big hand tousling, Mother softly crooning, drowsy bees among the begonias. Falling asleep against Father's chest, Mother's cool fingers caressing. Little duck, little duck, I remember . . .

"We look upon the method," Dr. Newkirk said, "as another door slammed in the face of Barbarism. Centuries ago, Man abjured the Old Testament canon of an eye for an eye, but his penal code remained firmly based on principles of Revenge."

"Ah," Dr. Kidder said. The ash of his cigarette had grown long and crooked before he realized that Dr. Newkirk's desk held no ashtray. Surreptitiously, he flicked the ash into the palm of his hand and slipped it into his pocket. Newkirk noticed nothing. Newkirk was not observant. Kidder decided he didn't like the man Newkirk, although he had admired the author Newkirk who had written in the *Journal of Psychiatry.*

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He wished now that he had restrained the enthusiasm of his letter to the doctor, and thereby avoided the invitation which had brought him to the Newkirk Clinic of Criminal Rehabilitation.

"The elimination of capital punishment," Newkirk went on in his irritating podium style, "was only the beginning of our social maturity. As long as Man exacted retribution of any kind against the lawbreakers of society, we could not call ourselves civilized. The headman's axe and the prison cell alike condemned us as immoral."

"True, true," Kidder murmured inaudibly. Having decided not to like Newkirk, it was painful to agree with him.

"When we failed to recognize criminality as a disease, we failed in our scientific understanding. When we failed to forgive it, we failed in our Christian duty. Haltingly, fumblingly, battling against ignorance and Man's childish need for vengeance, we crawled out of the Dark Ages into the light." Newkirk stroked his prognathous jaw. He was an ugly man, but he had kind eyes. Why didn't Kidder like his kind eyes?

"We made excuses for our failure," Newkirk said. "We called our prison system a restraint, not a punishment. We assuaged our guilt by half-hearted attempts at psychiatric rehabilitation within prison walls. Our record of success was pitiful, but it enabled us to go on treating criminals as penned beasts with a clear conscience.

"Eventually, we learned the use of chemotherapy and narco-analysis and forensic surgery. The prefrontal lobotomy in the case of the criminally insane, the amphetamine derivatives, the tranquilizing drugs, and other scientific attempts to 'cure' the criminal mind. A great step forward? Yes, but with what result? Did we return our criminals to society, back to complete usefulness? Only rarely, Doctor, only rarely, so great was our fear of recidivism. Those lawbreakers whose crimes were 'socially acceptable' were soon released. But those whose crimes still excited the blood lust, the rapists and murderers whose acts could never be fully forgiven by the mob—or even by dispassionate scientists—remained criminals forever."

"People are afraid," Kidder mumbled. "A man like Milo, for instance . . ."

"Yes, a man like Milo," Newkirk said. "In your letter, you said you had met Milo, Dr. Kidder."

"Yes, I did, briefly. When he first committed the crime. I happened to be in the company of Dr. Bradmore, the medical examiner, when he was called to the scene. As a matter of fact, Bradmore asked me to make a preliminary psychiatric examination; however, the order transferring him to your clinic was issued before I had that opportunity."

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"Well, I've had that opportunity, doctor, the chance to examine the criminal mind in its most maleficent form, depraved, perverted, vicious, irreclaimable. I wish you could have looked into that mind as I did, and seen the foul steaming hell it was."

I remember you, little brook, silver waters sliding between the green banks, little toy sailboat carried on your current. Look, Mother, look! It's the Good Ship Lollipop. Hah-hah-hah! Listen to Little Rover bark! Rover's a funny dog! See me ride my bicycle, Father? See how tall I'm getting, Father? I'm growing up, Mother, I'm getting to be a big boy. Yes, Milo, yes, a big boy soon, a big boy soon.

"A man is the product of his memories," Newkirk said. "Every psychological exploration, from Freud to the present confirms that simple truth. The memories stored within the neurons of our brain dictate our responses to all new stimuli; if those memories are evil, those responses will be evil. In the case of Milo, what could one expect from a brain synapsed from neuron to neuron with nothing but horror?"

"As bad as that?" Kidder said, stubbing out his cigarette in the waste basket.

"As bad as that," Newkirk said gravely. "Milo was born in the narcotics ward of a charity hospital, to a mother whose excesses caused her death before the boy was two years old. The woman's brother took the child and inflicted such cruelties upon him that he was permanently lamed at the age of five. A 'merciful' court made Milo a ward of the state, where he grew up under the brutalizing influence of a graft-ridden institution; he ran away at the age of ten and earned his living on the streets. He was victimized by thieves, panderers, degenerates; he committed his first murder at the age of fourteen and escaped a severer penalty only because of his youth. He was imprisoned until the age of twenty-one, and then pardoned. His criminal record after that was notable for its lack of human compassion. He served three more prison sentences, and the last, by virtue of a sternly arithmetical law, was for life imprisonment. In a general outbreak at Atlanta, he made good his escape. He wasn't recaptured until he—committed his final crime."

Dr. Kidder shivered. "Yes," he said. "A terrible thing. The poor Gilbert family—those three children—"

"I can't respond as you do," Newkirk said coldly. "The nature of the crime has nothing to do with the principle involved. If Milo had killed a hundred children—"

"It's difficult to be so objective," Kidder said apologetically. "If you had been the husband, perhaps—to come home and find your wife and children—"

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"Please," Newkirk said stiffly. "That is exactly the attitude I am fighting, doctor, that oversimplified, animal emotion which has delayed the progress of criminal rehabilitation so long. In the eyes of the world, Milo's crime was unpardonable. But in the eyes of science, he did nothing more than obey the impulses of a criminal memory which had been forced upon him from his first breath of life. This is the heart of my method. Not to eliminate Milo, but to destroy the true culprit—his memory. Destroy it completely, utterly, totally, eradicate every trace of it from the neurons of his brain, purge and cleanse it of every vestige of the past, and leave nothing behind but a clean, pure *tabula rasa* upon which to write a brave new story of human personality."

"Brainwashing?" Kidder said meekly.

"Nothing so crude, nothing so malevolent as that obsolete process. Through a combination of electrical shock therapy, drugs, and narco-hypnosis, we have made it possible to create total amnesia in the human brain without destroying the will, without creating human automatons, without altering the intelligence potential."

"But to eliminate *all* memory? Leave nothing at all behind?"

"Ah," Newkirk said. "But that is only one half of our method. A man with an evil memory is a criminal. A man with no memory at all is a vegetable. Therefore, we had to replace what we had taken away, doctor. We had to fill that empty vessel, of course, and we had to fill it with memory that would produce a good, useful, moral, and happy member of human society."

"An artificial memory?" Kidder said, forgetting himself and lighting another cigarette.

"Yes," Dr. Newkirk said.

I remember you, little red school. Round red apple in my hand. Reading and writing and rhythmic tapping of teacher's ferrule on the blackboard. Neat little rows of round scrubbed faces, neat little numbers in my copybook. Look, Mother, look, nothing but A's! Listen, Father, listen to me read! See me write in big round letters! Sweet ink-smell of glossy schoolbook pages. Walking home with little friends in crisp autumn air and crunching of leaves. Yay, team! Yay, team! Yay, team!

"It was the only logical answer," Newkirk said. "We have already seen how difficult, if not impossible, is the attempt to purge the mind of *only* its evil recollections. To take a mind soiled by brutality, poisoned by neglect, diseased by criminal habit, to take such a mind and launder it clean and white—the process is beyond our powers. But to supplant *all* its memories, with a past we *know* will produce

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a happy, stable, and functioning human being—what could be more desirable?

"The next problem was to create that artificial past, and to affix it firmly and irremovably upon the mind of our subject. The creation itself was a unique form of endeavor, a marriage of the artistic and the scientific. A team of psychologists, working with a team of fiction-writers, jointly produce a detailed 'memory-record' which would constitute the basic conscious memories of the patient from his earliest childhood to the present day. That memory-record is then transferred directly to the patient's subconscious, where it becomes 'grafted' to the neurons of his brain. Once this is done, the fictional account of his experiences is as permanent and real to the patient as the previous memory we have expunged from his mind."

"Well," Kidder said. "It's certainly an interesting idea. But it seems to me that—"

"I know exactly what you're thinking. You're concerned about the practicality of the method. After all, the past we create for our subjects is a fiction. What happens if they try to recapture it? To return to the people and places of their childhood? A good question, doctor."

Kidder smiled gratefully.

"Naturally, we considered this problem carefully. The solution is also simple. The patient is given a powerful, indeed an irresistable post-hypnotic command to leave the past behind him and look only to the future. This command is further supplemented by arranging, in his memory-record, for such things as the death of his parents —a peaceful death, you may be sure, one which leaves only a trace of gentle sorrow behind. So you see, doctor? We have thought of everything."

I remember you, little white crosses.

Why did it have to happen, Aunt Martha? They were so wonderful; why did it have to happen to them? Hush, child, hush, it was God's will, and you must be brave for their sake. I'm brave, Aunt Martha, see how brave I am? Listen, Aunt Martha, listen to what the letter says! I'm getting a scholarship, isn't that great? Europe! Switzerland! Isn't that wonderful? The Lauterbrunnen valley. The alpine meadows abloom with flowers. Edelweiss on the high slopes of the mountains. Schussing with the cold wind in my face . . .

"Of course it works," Newkirk said, as they walked down the corridor. "In Milo's case, the full course of the treatment hasn't been concluded, but we already know that the memory-transplantation has been completely successful. We have created a new personality, doctor, a gentle, loving human be-

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ing. You'll understand that better when you meet him."

"You mean I'll actually be able to talk to him?"

"Of course. Milo is perfectly conscious between his periods of treatment. As a psychiatrist, you should be well able to judge the type of personality he has become. Once the series is completed, we will have no hesitancy in turning him back into the world."

Kidder couldn't conceal his look of surprise.

"You mean you're going to let him go? Free?"

"Of course. He will be neither patient nor prisoner once the treatment is over. The disease which caused his terrible crime will be cured. And the 'criminal' who was responsible—will no longer exist. Why shouldn't he go free?"

"But it's still the same Milo, isn't it? I mean, no matter what you've done to his brain, it's the same man."

Newkirk smiled sardonically. "What do you mean by 'man', doctor?"

"You know what I mean! Even if you've scrubbed up his mind, he's still the same man who strangled that Gilbert woman, who slashed the throats of her children . . ."

"Well, well," Newkirk said icily. "So not all of us have come very far from the Dark Ages, have we, doctor?"

"I appreciate what you're doing, Newkirk, don't misunderstand me. I recognize its truth, even its morality, but—"

"But you can't really accept it, can you? You still find his crime so abhorrent that your savage instincts cry out for revenge."

Kidder flushed at the thought of his savage instincts; he was a mild little fellow. "I didn't say that, doctor. But it's only human—I mean, that Old Testament philosophy, it has a hold over people still —"

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Really, Kidder, I'm surprised at you. . . ." Newkirk forced himself to be affable again, and clappped the doctor about the shoulders. "Come on, my friend, you'll change your mind when you see the clinic itself, and our patient."

I remember you, Jennifer . . . . .

Strolling along the deck the moonlight haloed around your golden hair, your eyes solemn stars, your beautiful lips parted to speak, the sweet curve of your cheek resting against mine, the loving touch of your fingers. I remember you, your whispered words in my ear, my arms encircling you, thrilling to the touch. Your laughter, following me. Your smile. Your tears. Your promises and mine . . . Jennifer, I love you, I love you, I love you . . .

"And this," Newkirk said, en-

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compassing the large white room with a wave of his hand, "is our psychiatric workshop." It was partitioned like a business office; there were cubicles where men labored industriously over thick stacks of paper, a concentration of steel desks where young girls pounded away at noiseless typewriters; a computer whirred quietly in a corner. A row of private offices flanked both sides of the room, their mahogany doors shut.

"The method requires a sizeable staff of medical, technical, and semi-skilled employees," Newkirk said. "We have our own research organization, psychologists, writers, clerical people, and of course, Readers."

"Readers?" Kidder said.

"Of course. You see, doctor, the memory record which is created for our patients is usually some twelve thousand pages long, almost three million words in length. This 'story' of his imaginary past must be introduced into the mind of the subject, and the method we have found most effective is that of the Readers. Working in shifts, they do nothing more than read, slowly and precisely, the written material which is provided by our teams of writer-psychologists, while the patient himself is under narco-hypnosis, a state of total receptivity. Whatever is read to him becomes an irremovable part of his psyche. Our techniques may seem crude at the moment; I expect there will be other laborers in these vineyards who will follow and refine my work as was done for Freud."

Now Kidder knew why he disliked Newkirk. Newkirk was a glory-seeker. Freud, indeed!

"And are those your Readers?" Kidder said, nodding towards the cubicles.

"Yes. Each takes his turn in reading the memory-record to the patient." They strolled past the offices, and Newkirk's index finger lightly tapped the typewritten placard affixed to each doorway. "Feldman, Marquandt, Begley, Scarpone, Brice, Anderson . . . Not a very large staff at present, but as the number of our patients increases . . ."

"That last office," Kidder said. "The young man with the brown hair. Did you say his name was Anderson?"

"That's right, Philip Anderson. Mr. Eastman, the chief of our non-technical staff, hired him only recently. He's been doing some of the final Reading to Milo. Would you care to meet Mr. Eastman?"

"Couldn't I see the patient instead?"

Newkirk smiled. "Of course. I can see how anxious you are, doctor."

They were halfway across the floor when Kidder stopped in his tracks and looked over his shoulder.

"I knew the face was familiar. I knew it was . . ."

"Something wrong, doctor?"

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Kidder looked wide-eyed at the ugly, big-jawed face with the kind eyes.

"I met him when I saw Milo that first time. I even gave him a sedative at Dr. Bradmore's request; he was so overwrought. How could I forget that face? Even for a moment?"

"What ails you, Kidder?"

"That man who calls himself Anderson! My God, don't you check on your people, Newkirk? Didn't it even occur to you? His name isn't Anderson. It's Gilbert. He's the husband—the one whose wife—whose three children—"

I remember you, Jennifer.

Strolling together through the moonwashed lane of the park. The August night, perfumed by the trees and the scent of your hair. The feel of the grass beneath us, our faces touching, your quiet whispers. Your lips against mine, the saint-like serenity of your kiss. The fever in my blood, the drumbeat of my body. A need greater than tenderness, Jennifer. The sudden urge of brutality, strength in my hands, clutching. Jennifer, Jennifer, understand . . . your cry of terror and then my anger. Eyes like solemn stars fearful now. Golden hair awry. Slim white hands fighting, scratching . . . Jennifer, stop, stop! Fingers on the cool white throat. Don't make me do it, Jennifer, don't make me! Oh, God, God! Scream in the dark to be stopped, throttled scream of horror, checked, halted, squeezed into silence, squeezed, squeezed, squeezed . . .

Oh, God, I remember! I remember! I remember you, my guilt!

Into the dim, heavy-draped room. Newkirk first, and Kidder following, saw the kind eyes of Newkirk shut in rejection of the sight, at the failure of his purpose. Saw the body sway and spin inside the closet, the necktie looped about the neck, the cheeks purple and the tongue black, the face of Milo contorted in an agony not of pain alone but of tortured memory.

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"I knew you'd missed Long Island Sound!"

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BOOKS

I WANT TO APOLOGIZE TO POUL Anderson. Last month in this column, I criticised him for writing historical novels and spy-thrillers under the guise of science fiction. If I had read this month's batch of books, I might have praised him instead: his historical background had a feeling of authenticity that made for good reading.

Out of ten new novels here, most of them by prominent and experienced s-f writers, four may validly be considered speculative novels (and two of those are good ones: Clifford Simak's ALL FLESH IS GRASS, and John Christopher's THE RAGGED EDGE—about both of which, more later). The others include a medieval romance (set in an interstellar empire); a colonial-frontier-adventure story (in an interstellar federation); a modified spy-thriller-international-intrigue (mad-scientists-and-psionics) novel; a super-historical combining elements of all of these (interstellar empire again); a clipper-ship adventure (first interstellar exploratory voyage); and for a real change of pace, a doctor-love romance (return of interplanetary exploratory expedition).

Perhaps the most irritating thing about all this is that none of these books can be dismissed as worthless. Every one of them has something to offer: convincing characterizations or well-integrated background, or narrative skill or a basic idea of interest. Some have more than one: Frank Herbert's DUNE (the super-historical) has some of everything. Everything, that is, except the essential without which it does not fall into even the broadest definition of "speculative literature." It is not enough to ask: "What if . . . ?" That is, there must be a reasonably thoughtful attempt to answer the question. And if the work is to be considered science fiction (or, to be less demanding, science fantasy), there must also be a direct and significant relationship between the question under consideration and the imaginative or hypothetical element introduced.

When that connection exists only on the other end—between the *answer* and the fantasy—the more usual label is *deus ex ma-*

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china. Harry Harrison's new book[1], for instance, posits the intriguing problem of a viral epidemic for which the human body has no antibody reaction—and spread by birds. How do you lick a thing like that? Apparently by quarantining the boy-doctor and girl-doctor together long enough to explain the problem, and to give them a chance to develop a (genteely restrained) itch for each other—about one-quarter of the book; then junketing the boy-doc around the countryside with bird-shooting expeditions while the girl-doc stays in the lab doing experiments until she contracts the disease—another quarter. At this point, boy-doc realizes that medical research and public-health methods are inadequate, so he calls in the marines—well, actually, enlists an Army General in a private commando-type attack on the quarantined Jovian exploratory ship which brought back the infection. And what do you know? It turns out not to be treason or piracy but heroism, because sure enough there is an evil alien on board, who can be tortured into releasing the handy phial of cure he brought with him.

All right. If this book had come to me with an unknown name, from a lesser publisher, I would have dismissed it with a sentence and forgotten it. But Harrison knows better, and Doubleday, the biggest hard-cover s-f publisher in this country, ought to know better.

The problem as initially stated was fascinating. *As* stated, it might have acquired additional significance if, for instance, the plague was the result of a mutated terrestrial virus, and if the combined forces of World Health had had nothing but their best efforts to fall back on. *Or* if the problem had been differently stated (how to persuade an unknown alien to release the antidote to the fatal disease he has deliberately introduced) there might have been a (very different) equally good book in it.

As it is, the only thing that might have helped is a title change: something like "Dr. Kildare and the Jovian Menace."

Gordon Dickson's MISSON TO UNIVERSE[2] has only two things in common with PLAGUE FROM SPACE. One of these is another exploratory spaceship with equally little justification for its existence. The interstellar journey conducted by General Ben Shore and his crew of twenty-four could as well have been to Mars in 1967, to the Antarctic or the Congo in 1927, on a sailing ship in 1887, or work your own way back through periods of exploration and discovery. The actual experiences on board

[1]PLAGUE FROM SPACE, Harry Harrison; Doubleday, 1965; 207 pp.; $3.95.
[2]MISSION TO UNIVERSE, Gordon Dickson; Berkley #F1147, 1965; 175 pp.; 50¢.

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ship, as well as the adventures on alien planets, are all basic, familiar, easily translatable into any other framework. The significant idea here had no connection with the physical environment, but with the social one: Dickson is exploring the personality of a hero-leader, a man who feels himself set apart from others, whose ego-satisfactions have narrowed into the puritan range of "rightness" and "respect," and "responsibility." Shore fakes orders to undertake the journey out of his own conviction that he is right; takes the standby crew with him on his own responsibility; establishes a military form of organization and adheres to it rigorously, out of a sincere belief that the lives of everyone on board depend on their respect for him and willingness to take his orders. His most terrible experience on the voyage is not when he must shoot his only friend, but when he is publicly humiliated by a group of aliens; he is flattered when a reporter says to him that he has ice-water instead of blood flowing through his veins.

It is a good study, as far as it goes, and given a more appropriate setting, might have been a much better one. Since primitive conditions creating individual deaths and personal embarrassment were the stuff Dickson worked with, rather than metaphysical or technological difficulties, he could have concentrated more effectively on his central character's relations with the other crew members had he made use of a less exotic, more familiar, journey for the General's trials. But even that might not have helped, because in terms of the problem set up, he did exactly what Harrison did: at the end, he avoided having to sum up the experiences of his character, or outline any conclusions, simply by having the whole world decide Shore was just as *right* as he thought he was. Instead of having to face himself, Shore returns eventually to find himself not only a hero, not only universally admired, but *loved* as well.

It makes him happy.

Dickson introduces, mostly by implication, a theme that runs through most of this crop of books —the *All Them Zombies* theme. (Listen: you can hear the movie music!) In THE ALTAR OF ASCONEL,[3] one of John Brunner's less noteworthy efforts, the theme is given full rein in a hypnotic-control religion. Brunner also gives us (in just *one* side of an Ace Double), a dying interstellar empire, a scholarly monastic order, a rip-snortin' space warrior, a waifish girl telepath, a small band of loyal patriots, and this ugly psychotic alien, who is perhaps the prototype for one of the most popular (by frequency of appearance) characters of the season, the Fat

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Man (of whom more, much more, later).

Actually, this is a more than adequate adventure yarn—well-told, well-paced, filled with thrills, chills, and spills, and the very model of the modern version of the Pseudoscience Story.

"Pseudoscience" is the heading under which the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature,* and other similarly respectable reference works, used self-consciously to list what little science fiction they could not avoid mentioning. The term is not precisely applicable these days I suppose, when hardly anyone bothers with scientific gobbledegook any more. "Pseudospace" or "pseudopsych" or even "pseudospec" might be better; ASCONEL could fit under any of those.

Nor am I being sarcastic when I add that Brunner does it almost as well as Rider Haggard. I just don't know why he bothered.

Ted White's first novel,[3] on the flip side, is the first one so far of which I can say that it is at least fully justified in its use of a futuristic setting. The protagonist is an android, and *validly* so: in the conflict between his conscious awareness of himself as a man, and his discovery of his machine origin, White sets up a vivid and highly appropriate symbol of a society in which mankind is struggling between a machine-like (zombie-type) conformism, and "criminal" naturalistic impulses.

Unhappily, once having set up an ideally related theme, background, and personal problem, the author proceeds to abandon the background in a series of dream-like sequences of alternate-life probabilities, and to ignore all the conflicts that stem from the hero's peculiar composition. There is no effort to reconcile even the most obvious technical anomalies, let alone the psychological derivatives. Our android does pause to wonder at one point how he can bleed, regenerate flesh, and heal super-fast, with no marrow in his steel bones; but he never finds out, and never even seems to question his susceptibility under ordinary conditions (which tend to be of the Raymond Chandler-derived school, emphasizing seduction in luxurious surroundings) to hunger, thirst, fatigue, and a variety of other biological compulsions, whereas his "overdrive" performances when under control of The Machine (during which times he has the strength and speed of a steel-boned superman) seem to leave him hardly tired, let alone in need of food or drink.

Presumably, he has two complete separate energy systems, both able to operate through both the

[3] ANDROID AVENGER, Ted White (113 pp.), and THE ALTAR OF ASCONEL, John Brunner (143 pp.); Ace Double, #M-123, 1965; 45¢.

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steel bones and the protoplasmic musculature.

All this might be no more than a minor irritation, because there is some good writing in the book, and because the basic proposition was not a technical one anyhow. But when the author abandons not only his superficial premises, but his own superb symbol-setting, by permitting the story to be resolved in a conflict between the (it turns out) basically beneficient machine and the Small Group of Evil Men (such as are no longer called Mad Scientists) who had attempted to turn it to their own uses—

What we are left with, I am afraid, is what (in a family magazine) I can only refer to as the apocryphal invention of the limerickal young man from Racine. (*And* a Fat Man. Patience, I'll get back to him.)

Nevertheless, score one for White: with whatever inadequacies, this is s-f. At least the God-machine was there from the beginning, and had some function all along.

Michael Moorcock's FIRECLOWN[4] comes even closer. Once again, the theme is—on one level—the growing conflict between individualism and conformity in our culture. In this book, the other level of meaning inherent in the Zombie theme emerges more clearly as a sort of inside-out version of s-f's old favorite, the Superman. Apparently we have tired of thinking of ourselves as freaks, no matter how terribly clever; now it's All Them Zombies—and the few "normal" people who have not yet become conformist puppets. In any case, Moorcock comes up with a symbolic figure quite as appropriate as White's android, and rather more colorful: the Fireclown, a half-mad hero-villain (and quasi-Fat Man), who uses live fire as propaganda and laughter as a weapon, inflaming the buried instincts and responses of the citizens of a supremely safe-and-sane near-future rationalistic state.

On both the sociological and subconscious levels, the book sustains itself admirably. The zombie populace, roused from complacency, becomes a raging (but just as zombie) mob; the glorious Fireclown *is*, after all, a freak, and inevitably destroys himself; the viable solution is neither stasis nor psychosis, but the truer sanity of a sustained balance between order and innovation.

Thematically, it's great. If the surface story halfway measured up to the symbolic and subliminal signifiance, this one might be something to shout about. But the protagonist is hopelessly enmeshed in a complexity of relationships—var-

[4]THE FIRECLOWN, Michael Moorcock; Compact #F281, (London), 1965; 189 pp.; 3/6 (60¢).

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iously legitimate, illicit, and lustful—inside the politically powerful Powys family (who hold sway in that rational oversane state, you see), and computer-age politicking is conducted much on the model of a high school Student Council election—whereas some of the best bits in the book seem to be displaced scenes from some *other* book—something Moorcock would like to write, perhaps, but hasn't yet. (Chapter Fourteen, for instance, is a *great* scene in a decayed and decadent London; but *why?*)

One careful rewrite might have made all the difference.

Avram Davidson's RORK!,[5] on the other hand, owes most of its merit to the skill of the treatment. This is a frontier adventure story (complete with bashful dustkickin' young hero), which on second thought barely qualifies as some sort of s-f, simply by the inclusion of the *rorks.* It would have been gratifying if these fascinating creatures had any integral part to play in the ecology of the planet, or in the relations between the settlers and the natives. As it is, they do turn out to serve a *purpose,* somewhat make-work, but—well, it did have to be an alien planet to have the rorks, and they're worth having, even if they have nothing much to do with the story.

Just to keep the score straight, this one is basically about—you guessed it—conformity vs. individualism. It has three separate and distinct zombie-types, and a small group of Real People (outcasts raised among the rorks) in addition to the halfbreed girl (daughter of a Terran and a "Wild Tock," a native not yet contained in the Terran sphere of influence). Plus, of course, Jimmy Stewart—I mean, Ran Lomar, the inexpertly enterprising hero. And then there is one semi-Real character—the Fat Man: this time he's the Colonial Administrator, overcivilized, rococo, homosexual, although more blasé than malicious or psychotic.

The truth is, Davidson is in exceptionally good form in this one, and I suppose when the writing is good enough, and some conscientious effort has been made to supply a little extra in the way of exotic background, one needn't *insist* on intellectual content or speculative values besides.

Fred Pohl's Fat Man is the pure prototype; in fact, A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS[6] probably brings both Fat Man and Zombies to their peak, for this batch. The zombies are anybody, everybody, one time or another: people become "possessed," and do anything from senseless rape-murder-arson-etc.

[5] RORK!, Avram Davidson; Berkley #F1146, 1965; 144 pp.; 50¢

[6] A PLAGUE OF PYTHONS, Frederik Pohl; Ballantine #U2174, 1965; 158 pp.; 50¢.

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to mindless, backbreaking, till-they-drop labor. The Fat Man is so fat he can hardly move, obscene, corrupt, disgusting, and a Mad Scientist to boot. I won't say who the Possessors are, because Pohl actually tells this absurd story so smoothly that you may enjoy two-thirds or three-quarters of it before the foolishness of the whole thing gets to you: but I balk at the notion of a thousand individual minds controlling a population of two billion totally, when each can dominate only one person at a time, and most of their energies seem to be used in private pleasure (?) pursuits.

More seriously, I quibble, nay quarrel, with the assumption on which this whole plot is based, that any invention today can be kept secret by a few assassinations; or that scientific knowledge attained and in use can be retained as the property of a limited group, in an advanced technological civilization.

This quarrel is rather more significant in relation to Frank Herbert's much more serious (and perhaps a bit pretentious) long novel, DUNE.[7] My feeling about most of the books discussed previously is that they were in all likelihood written too fast and too facilely, for an eagerly expanding market —and published by editors either too unknowing or uncaring to demand the work the authors are capable of. DUNE is a complex, closely worked book, and a handsome volume besides. There are charts and maps and glossaries and pseudo-historical essays to prove that Herbert did his homework—if proof were needed beyond the skillful construction, close attention to detail, and painstaking narrative edifice of the novel itself. There is no carlessness involved here on the part of either publisher or author —except the most basic lack of care.

I don't think any amount of effort or ability could have made this odd hodgepodge of concepts stick together. I cannot possibly trace the many strands interwoven in the novel, in this space, but the "Bene Gesserit" is sufficient, really. Herbert hypothesizes an esoteric organization which has brought all the cults, mysteries, arts, and quasi-sciences of mind-body control to a peak of practical working accomplishment; he then elects to believe that people who have attained the serenity, wisdom, self-discipline, mental, physical, and emotional powers ascribed to the Bene Gesserit women would allow themselves to become hopelessly involved in court intrigues on the pattern of the Borgias' Italy, dealing wholesale in assassinations and assignations—to what end? Why, to bring together (over

[7] DUNE, Frank Herbert; Chilton, 1965; 395 pp. plus map, glossary, appendices; $5.95.

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many centuries) certain "bloodlines" whose culmination will be in a single birth, a boy who will be known as the *Kwisatz Haderach,* the "Shortener of the Way," whose "organic mental powers would bridge space and time."

In some unknown way, this boy is to be the saviour of all—and "all," in this case, means an interstellar Imperium with a technology advanced enough to permit intersystem trips for bickering feudal lordlings' fetes and festivals—an economy of marvellous abundance in its larger aspects—in which nevertheless there *are* bickering feudal lordlings, and their young sons are raised to knife fights and duelling in exactly the manner of the manor—6th Century Arthurian.

Herbert comments somewhere in the book on the dignity with which a culture treats its dead as a measure of its civilization. A more accurate measure, I think (if only because more obvious—"dignity" is very much in the eye of the beholder), is the value it places on life. Human life is cheap only when the population exceeds its means of subsistence; individual human lives become dearer as the per capita wealth increases. Again, the industrial revolution demolished the social and economic structure of feudalism as ruthlessly and inevitably as the technology, first of mass production, and now of automation, is eradicating the small businessman, the small independent farmer, and the sociology attendant on free competitive enterprise. No matter how many science fiction writers choose to place their far future stories in far past settings, the gladiatorial arena and the *duello* are as inconsistent with energy shields and starships as the divine right of kings with the European Common Market.

Again (and back to my main point), as science and technology advance, as human control over the physical environment and the means of subsistence grows stronger, as the standard of living of the "common man" rises (whether in a family, tribe, nation, or Interstellar Imperium), that man *becomes less common.* He has leisure, and then more leisure; he acquires education.

If there is one lesson the citizens of the Atom Age should have learned by now, it is that beyond a certain level of civilization, there *are no esoteric mysteries.* Knowledge is infectious; it seems to contain its own built-in urgency for communication. If an organization like the Bene Gesserit existed in the Imperium, they would not (and could not if they would) retain the secrets of their wisdom. It is reasonable in Pohl's PYTHONS, in Davidson's RORK!, in Christopher's RAGGED EDGE, for groups of people abruptly deprived of a familiar civilization to revert al-

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most as rapidly to tribal and feudal patterns in which the Boss is symbolic of the power to kill—because in time of hunger, man is effectively a cannibal: he may not eat the flesh of his victims, but he will and does slaughter his own kind to feed off them *or* their possessions. At such times, the farsightedness involved in the search for abstract knowledge, or the leisure to pursue it, are so rare as to be suspect; at such times, civilized thinking and metaphysical abstractions do indeed encyst and become "mysteries." But the situation is temporary and "unnatural," it occurs only in times of technological and economic ebb.

That Herbert knows this he demonstrates with skill, with care, with delicacy and precision, in his portrait, inside this wild mural, of the desert society of the "Fremen" on the planet Arrakis. Here he gives us a planetary ecology, and a civilization to suit it, which are as thoughtful, thought-provoking, and fascinating as any I have ever come across. And he is as right to speak of the dignity with which they treat their dead—whom they do, literally, cannibalize, not for flesh, but for essential water—as he is completely correct in describing their avid response to an opportunity to learn.

This is a long book, and in its major premises quite unworthy of the work put into it. But it is worth your while for the story inside the story—not to mention a Fat Man unsurpassed for vicious villainy.

It has been unfair, perhaps, to expend, as I have, almost all my space and words on critical reports, leaving for last (among the novels) the two books I liked best. In effect, I have already bespoken their virtues in opposites.

THE RAGGED EDGE [8] is a "survivor story," describing the effects on a small area of southern England and the Channel Islands, of an almost totally destructive series of earthquakes and planetary upheavals. Christopher is writing here about country and people he knows well; the geography and the artifacts, as well as the needs and fears, hostilities, hopes, suspicions, strengths, cruelties and kindness, of the characters, are compellingly convincing. I hesitate to say this, because the earlier book has lived vividly in my memory for some years now, and I have not reread it recently, but it is *possible* that this one is the equal of George Stewart's EARTH ABIDES. Well, I do hesitate to say it; by next year I'll know; meanwhile, suffice it that I couldn't put it down.

This was just as true for Cliff Simak's ALL FLESH IS GRASS,[9]

[8] THE RAGGED EDGE, John Christopher; Simon & Schuster, 1966; $4.50.
[9] ALL FLESH IS GRASS, Clifford D. Simak; Doubleday, 1965; 260 pp.; $3.95.

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which will probably be my personal nomination for the best science fiction novel of 1965. It will perhaps surprise you to learn that the theme—in part, at least—of this one has to do with conformity vs. individualism. And there are—in a way—some zombies, too. But no prancing princes, no fidgeting fat man; no hasty conclusions or unwarranted preconceptions; just believable people confronted with a situation they'd rather *not* believe, backed up with some solid speculative content, and sustained by the oxymorons of insightful objectivity and sturdy tenderness that seem to characterize Simak's work A book both meaningful and eminently readable.

I have already overrun my allotted space. But there are a number of books here which have been pushed from column to column, and are overdue for mention.

THE BEST OF NEW WORLDS[10] is a long-overdue collection from a magazine too little read in this country. Except for Harry Harrison's "I See You," all the entries are British, but many of the names are familiar here by now. Again, I find myself wanting to list one story after another; more to the point, I suspect, would be my urgent recommendation to American publishers to do an edition here. Outstanding selections by authors *not* much known here: "The Fall of Frenchy Steiner," by Hilary Bailey; Langdon Jones' "I Remember, Anita;" Moorcock's "The Time Dweller." For the rest—Aldiss's "The Pit my Parish," Sellings's "The Outstretched Hand," Ballard's "Terminal Beach," Brunner's "Last Lonely Man," and more by James White, Robert Presslie, Colin Kapp, John Baxter, E. C. Tubb, James Colvin, and B. J. Bailey. Well worth the trouble of mail-ordering.

Two new editions of deservedly familiar work are at hand:—

THREE BY HEINLEIN[11] combines two of his best short novels, WALDO and MAGIC, INC., with the comparatively drab PUPPET MASTERS. If you don't own the earlier combined edition of the two magic-science (science-magic?) novellas, you will probably want the inevitable book club edition of this; if you have not *read* either of them, you may not want to wait.

THE NEW INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE[12] is a com-

[10] THE BEST OF NEW WORLDS, ed. Michael Moorcock; Compact #H287 (London) 1965; 318 pp., 15 stories; 5/- (80¢).

[11] THREE BY HEINLEIN: The Puppet Masters, Waldo, and Magic, Inc., Robert A. Heinlein; Doubleday, 1965; 426 pp.; $5.95.

[12] THE NEW INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE, Isaac Asimov; Basic Books, 1965; 798 pp. (120 illustrations), plus an Appendix on "Mathematics in Science" (15 pp.), an extensive bibliography, indexes of names and subjects, and a Foreword by George W. Beadle; $12.50.

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pletely revised, expanded, and updated edition of the original volume of five years ago. (70,000 new words, and some first-rate photographs, with fresh information on quasars, masers and lasers, DNA, *Mariner* and *Ranger* discoveries, etc.) No reader of this magazine needs to be told about The Good Doctor. Suffice it that this "State of the Sciences" message is probably the most comprehensive *readable* book on the subject available anywhere. (The style is a bit meatier than the magazine articles, but just as human.) The book would be worth the price for some of the illustrations alone; or for the new information: figure you're getting double value to start with, and the original material thrown in free.

Finally, one (very) miscellaneous item:

Ace has brought out a collection of Gahan Wilson's cartoons.[13] Even if you don't read *Playboy* or *Punch* or any of those *other* places he draws for, you don't need me to tell you about this one.

—JUDITH MERRIL

British publications may be purchased by mail from Kenneth F. Slater, FANTAST (MEDWAY) Ltd., 75 Norfolk Street, Wisbech, Cambs. England. The dollar-equivalents prices listed here include an estimated allowance for postage.

[13] GRAVESIDE MANNER, Gahan Wilson; Ace #F331, 1965; cartoon collection; 40¢.

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In the past, critics have been remarkably intense in their distaste or admiration for the writings of Rudyard Kipling. This was largely provoked by his outspoken political and social commentary, but now that Kipling has been dead for 30 years, and his work isolated from his times, there has been a revived interest in (and probably a calmer reaction to) his legacy. The too-little-known poem below reflects both the unmatched musical quality of his verse and his belief that man's salvation lies in action, not dreams.

TOMLINSON

by Rudyard Kipling

Now Tomlinson gave up the ghost in his house in Berkeley Square,
And a Spirit came to his bedside and gripped him by the hair—
A Spirit gripped him by the hair and carried him far away,
Till he heard as the roar of a rain-fed ford the roar of the Milky Way,
Till he heard the roar of the Milky Way die down and drone and cease,
And they came to the Gate within the Wall where Peter holds the keys.
'Stand up, stand up now, Tomlinson, and answer loud and high

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'The good that ye did for the sake of men or ever ye came to die—
'The good that ye did for the sake of men in little earth so lone!'
And the naked soul of Tomlinson grew white as a rain-washed bone.
'O, I have a friend on earth,' he said, 'that was my priest and guide,
'And well would he answer all for me if he were by my side.'
—'For that ye strove in neighbour-love it shall be written fair,
'But now ye wait at Heaven's Gate and not in Berkeley Square:
'Though we called your friend from his bed this night, he could not speak for you,
'For the race is run by one and one and never by two and two.'
Then Tomlinson looked up and down, and little gain was there,
For the naked stars grinned overhead, and he saw that his soul was bare:
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it cut him like a knife,
And Tomlinson took up his tale and spoke of his good in life.
'This I have read in a book,' he said, 'and that was told to me,
'And this I have thought that another man thought of a Prince in Muscovy.'
The good souls flocked like homing doves and bade him clear the path,
And Peter twirled the jangling keys in weariness and wrath.
'Ye have read, ye have heard, ye have thought,' he said, 'and the tale is yet to run:
'By the worth of the body that once ye had, give answer—what ha' ye done?'
Then Tomlinson looked back and forth, and little good it bore,
For the Darkness stayed at his shoulder-blade and Heaven's Gate before:

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'Oh, this I have felt, and this I have guessed, and this I have heard men say,
'And this they wrote that another man wrote of a carl in Norroway.'
'Ye have read, ye have felt, ye have guessed, good lack! Ye have hampered Heaven's Gate;
'There's little room between the stars in idleness to prate!
'Oh, none may reach by hired speech of neighbour, priest, and kin,
'Through borrowed deed to God's good meed that lies so fair within;
'Get hence, get hence to the Lord of Wrong, for dome has yet to run,
'And . . . the faith that ye share with Berkeley Square uphold you, Tomlinson!'

The Spirit gripped him by the hair, and sun by sun they fell
Till they came to the belt of Naughty Stars that rim the mouth of Hell:
The first are red with pride and wrath, the next are white with pain,
But the third are black with clinkered sin that cannot burn again:
They may hold their path, they may leave their path, with never a soul to mark,
They may burn or freeze, but they must not cease in the Scorn of the Outer Dark.
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it nipped him to the bone,
And he yearned to the flare of Hell-gate there as the light of his own hearth-stone.
The Devil he sat behind the bars, where the desperate legions drew,
But he caught the hasting Tomlinson and would not let him through.
'Wot ye the price of good pit-coal that I must pay?' said he,
'That ye rank yoursel' so fit for Hell and ask no leave of me?

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'I am all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that ye should give me scorn,
'For I strove with God for your First Father the day that he was born.
'Sit down, sit down upon the slag, and answer loud and high
The harm that ye did to the Sons of Men or ever you came to die.'
And Tomlinson looked up and up, and saw against the night
The belly of a tortured star blood-red in Hell-Mouth light;
And Tomlinson looked down and down, and saw beneath his feet
The frontlet of a tortured star milk-white in Hell-Mouth heat.
'Oh, I had a love on earth,' said he, 'that kissed me to my fall,
'And if ye would call my love to me I know she would answer all.'
—'All that ye did in love forbid it shall be written fair,
'But now ye wait at Hell-Mouth Gate and not in Berkeley Square:
'Though we whistled your love from her bed to-night, I trow she would not run,
'For the sin ye do by two and two ye must pay for one by one!'
The Wind that blows between the worlds, it cut him like a knife,
And Tomlinson took up the tale and spoke of his sin in life:
'Once I ha' laughed at the power of Love and twice at the grip of the Grave,
'And thrice I ha' patted my God on the head that men might call me brave.'
The Devil he blew on a brandered soul and set it aside to cool:
'Do ye think I would waste my good pit-coal on the hide of a brain-sick fool?
'I see no worth in the hobnailed mirth or the jolt-head jest ye did

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'That I should waken my gentlemen that are sleeping three on a grid.'
Then Tomlinson looked back and forth, and there was little grace,
For Hell-Gate filled the houseless Soul with the Fear of Naked Space.
'Nay, this I ha' heard,' quo' Tomlinson, 'and this was noised abroad,
'And this I ha' got from a Belgian book on the word of a dead French lord.'
—'Ye ha' heard, ye ha' read, ye ha' got, good lack! And the tale begins afresh—
'Have ye sinned one sin for the pride o' the eye or the sinful lust of the flesh?'
Then Tomlinson he gripped the bars and yammered 'Let me in—
'For I mind that I borrowed my neighbour's wife to sin the deadly sin.'
The Devil he grinned behind the bars, and banked the fires high:
'Did ye read of that sin in a book?' said he; and Tomlinson said 'Ay!'
The Devil he blew upon his nails, and the little devils ran;
And he said, 'Go husk this whimpering thief that comes in the guise of a man:
'Winnow him out 'twixt star and star, and sieve his proper worth:
'There's sore decline in Adam's line if this be spawn of earth.'
Empusa's crew, so naked-new they may not face the fire,
But weep that they bin too small to sin to the height of their desire,
Over the coal they chased the Soul, and racked it all abroad,
As children rifle a caddis-case or the raven's foolish hoard.
And back they came with the tattered Thing, as children after play,
And they said: 'The soul that he got from God he has bartered clean away.

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'We have threshed a stook of print and book, and winnowed a chattering wind
'And many a soul wherefrom he stole, but his we cannot find:
'We have handled him, we have dandled him, we have seared him to the bone,
'And sure if tooth and nail show truth he has no soul of his own.'
The Devil he bowed his head on his breast and rumbled deep and low:—
'I'm all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that I should bid him go.
'Yet close we lie, and deep we lie, and if I gave him place,
'My gentlemen that are so proud would flout me to my face;
'They'd call my house a common stews and me a careless host,
'And—I would not anger my gentlemen for the sake of a shiftless ghost.'
The Devil he looked at the mangled Soul that prayed to feel the flame,
And he thought of Holy Charity, but he thought of his own good name:
'Now ye could haste my coal to waste, and sit ye down to fry:
'Did ye think of that theft for yourself?' said he; and Tomlinson said 'Ay!'
The Devil he blew an outward breath, for his heart was free from care:
'Ye have scarce the soul of a louse,' he said, 'but the roots of sin are there,
'And for that sin should ye come in were I the lord alone.
'But sinful pride has rule inside—and mightier than my own.
'Honour and Wit, fore-damned they sit, to each his priest and whore:
'Nay, scarce I dare myself go there, and you they'd torture sore.
'Ye are neither spirit nor spirk,' he said; 'ye are neither book nor brute—

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'Go, get ye back to the flesh again for the sake of Man's repute.
'I'm all o'er-sib to Adam's breed that I should mock your pain,
'But look that ye win to worthier sin ere ye come back again.
'Get hence, the hearse is at your door—the grim black stallions wait—
'They bear your clay to place to-day. Speed, lest ye come too late!
'Go back to Earth with a lip unsealed—go back with an open eye,
'And carry my word to the Sons of Men or ever ye come to die:
'That the sin they do by two and two they must pay for one by one—
'And . . . the God that you took from a printed book be with you, Tomlinson!'

COMING NEXT MONTH

Cugel the Clever has traversed the Mountains of Magnatz, but he is yet far from home—and Iucounu, the Laughing Magician, who has sent him upon this terrible quest (the story of which was told in THE OVERWORLD, in our December, 1965* issue, and THE MOUNTAINS OF MAGNATZ in our February, 1966 issue*).

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Take a night when the sea fog rolls in over the quays and streets, add an average Irishman and a few mugs of steam beer to oil his tongue and imagination, and you are more than likely to set loose a little bit of magic.

LIL, RORRITY, AND A FOAMIN' SEA OF STEAM BEER

by Richard Olin

DANIEL RORRITY WAS A SHORT, stubby and considerably battered Irishman of about forty and some. A crack-billed sea cap perched perpetually on the back of his head. (Rorrity had been a fisherman before his accident.) The cap was almost as battered as he. He wore the piece of headgear too far back on his head to keep his rust and gray hair out of his eyes. So, since his cap did not even keep hair out of his eyes, and he could no longer fish, several people considered his sea cap to be a useless affectation.

But those who thought so were wrong. The cap was as much a part of Rorrity as his pea jacket, or his hands, still horn-like and scarred from his years of pulling line—or his stiff back, for that matter, the back which had been lamed one squally night when a trawling boom smashed him flat.

Daniel Rorrity collected his disability check each month. But he never called it a disability payment. He always referred to it as his "unemployment," because he never admitted he was beached. He was just looking for the right boat and, when he found her, he would go fishing again.

Or, (and this was his favorite plan) he would begin saving a part of his check each month, and when he had saved enough he would buy a boat of his own. Fishing was hard work for an older man. Why should he go back to it? It was the sea he really loved. And once enough had been saved, why, back

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to the sea he would go. In point of fact, most of each month's check was spent on steam beer.

Steam beer is not easy to find these days, even in San Francisco. So Rorrity's favorite bar was a small, basement watering-place stuck off on a side street halfway between Telegraph Hill and the fishing boat wharves.

The beer was a good investment. When Rorrity was drunk he was happy and more than just a little talkative. (His friends called him "Roarey.") And he would spend hours with Lilly telling her of all the places he and she would go when he finally got his boat.

Lil was a small girl with a bigger than average heart. She worked as a B-girl in "The Chowder Kettle," (that was the bar's name) but she never hustled "Roarey" for a drink. Like Rorrity, she was no longer young. But she liked him to talk because it made him happy. And maybe she wanted a piece of his dreams for herself. In her own way, Lil was as beat up as Rorrity.

By that I don't mean she wasn't prettier than he—a shaved ape would have been! Just that sometimes, there are beatings that don't show on the outside.

"Roarey" liked her because she never called him by that name. To Lil he was always "Danny."

Danny told her about Kingstown and Jamaica and the Mexican coasts until she could near see them herself. Rorrity was a talker all right and no mistake. And when the power came over him—which it always did after about the second quart or so of dark—why, his gravelled voice was almost hypnotic he was so wrapped up in what he was thinking and seeing.

Lil loved it. With his voice droning in her ear like loose gravel sliding across the bedplates of a barge, Lil could see the places he'd been just as if she were standing right there. It was better than going to the movies.

She knew all about how the blue waters (and they're an incredible bright blue) jump and sparkle off Bahia de San Cristobal, which is on the coast of Baja California. And she could have told you how the jungles have an emerald metal look to them when you lie offshore the coast of Guatemala; she'd seen the way the tidal rips crest and swell when they race through the Yucatan Channel, and she knew the exact shade of black the volcanic sands have when you look down on them, through five fathoms of crystal water, off Trinidad.

Oh, Rorrity was a talker all right. But—as I said earlier—only when the power was on him. Otherwise he might have gotten it all down on paper sometime and had a far different life from that of a simple, beached fisherman. But the words never fell out quite the same way when he tried to think of them the next morning.

After he was beached, Rorrity

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read a surprising lot of things, though he talked as if he had never in his life cracked a book. He told Lil, just confidentially once, why it was he talked his best when he sat with her over a friendly beer, and right when the evening fog had come stealing in over the streets from the quays. It was because of magic.

There are still some things left in this world (Rorrity solemnly explained) that have a small, almost vanishing bit of the olden magic yet in them. Steam beer is one, because it is naturally made, you see, and allowed to ferment in the old style—which was ancient before ever the Druids and Celts and such like toddled home from their first tosspot party at Stonehenge. Now, if you count steam beer as having a weak magic still left to it—why, then you must count the imagination of the average Irishman as well. As everyone knows—between pukas, feys, the banshee, the Costa Barrow and the shelaigh o'garien—any Irish imagination has a clutter of things stowed in it that aren't a bit all in this world. And the last element of the old earth magic that worked on Rorrity's tongue and magnified his senses—(not counting the simplest magic of all, that Lil sat and listened to him . . . Rorrity was too shy to mention that)—the last weak magic left was in the fog, itself. Sea fog, he explained, rolls in from miles beyond the last breakers and, consequently, it carries the breath of the great Ocean on its back. On a thickly fogged evening when everything is mixed up and white, why, the hard land blends with thin air so that no man on such an evening knows quite rightly where or on what he stands.

So, on nights when all things blend together just right—why, a man might see a great many events of the sort he doesn't commonly expect.

One of the most likely of the unlikely things Rorrity thought could happen was that Brandy Wallace, he whom he hadn't set eyes on in ten years, would come walking in through the bar's front door.

"I giv' him a bit of money once, you know, Lil. It was to help him make the down payment on a tuna fisher. Brandy was a bright lad, and had a sound idea. Shouldn't surprise me to hear he owns half the tuna fleet by now.

"A good friend, Brandy was. None better. And none more grateful. He'll be lookin' to pay me back thousands for my help. Oh, it was only a hundred and fifty dollars I giv' him. Little enough, but all I had on me at the time. And Brandy is that generous you wouldn't believe it.

"He'll know he owes his present status as a millionaire to me, and it's thousands he'll give us in thanks, Lil. The moment he comes through that door, Lil, that's when we'll have our own boat!"

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Or sometimes, when the beer was rising gently to his scuppers, Rorrity said: "Look here, Lil." And Lil, who had seen it many times before, watched patiently as Rorrity took with great care a tiny ship's model from the inside of his pea coat.

"That's our ship, Lil. A forty foot, gaff-rigged yawl. Just like the one Captain Joshua Slocum sailed single-handed around the world."

And holding the ship tenderly, Rorrity pointed out with precision and love the fine characteristics, the clean lines, and the delicate rigging which made her such a clean and easy ship to handle.

"We could go anywhere in her, Lil. Down to the Horn, perhaps," he chuckled. "Where we could see the cormorants and gulls getting their silly, feathery arses wet because the last few rocks barely clear the water. Tierra del Fuego, 'Land of Fire,' the Spaniards called it. Which, come to think of it, is an uncommon bad choice to call it—a place were a whole continent is gettin' its tail dipped.

"You know, Lil, there's a little bit of rock down there at the bottom of the hemisphere. It's so close to being under that not even a young gull would bother to sit on it. I'd like to show it to you someday, Lil. It's worth looking at because that one small rock is the bleedin' *tip* of South America."

He put the boat model away. "But that's the sort of vessel we need, Lil. She could take us *anywhere*."

One time, when he was more drunk on poetry perhaps than beer, he told her:

"Nights like this giv' me a funny sort of notion, Lil. The fog is hangin' outside the window just now like it was the white sheets of Mrs. McLeary's Monday wash. Somehow I keep thinkin' that—if I could just do it right—we could have our ship now, and not have the wait or the need for Brandy to pay me the thousands he rightfully owes."

Lil asked how that might be.

Rorrity's rust and gray eyebrows knitted in concentration.

He gently held the ship model between his gnarled and still strong fingers. "It's like somethin' inside me is sayin': 'Float yer model in a good mug of dark beer, Rorrity, and she will grow.' "

He chuckled at his own renegade imagination. "That's a silly thing for a grown man to be thinkin'."

Rorrity's eyes widened as he understood the full gist of his vagrant thought. "Why, Lil—if I could just do it right—this pint of dark would grow to a full, foamin' sea. And our model wouldn't be a toy any longer. She'd be our own, full sized ship.

"A silly thing for a grown man to be thinkin'," he repeated. "But what a ship and a sea that would *be*, Lil. And no knowing what islands or paradises and queer like

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places we might find on its other side. We might sail on it direct to 'Fiddler's Green,' or even 'High Barbaree.' "

Lil smiled happily, though she had no idea what those strange sounding places might be. 'High Barbaree' she liked best, because even its name sounded like the roll and slide of the sea.

Rorrity nodded, as if coming to a decision he was satisfied with. "Some night we'll do it, Lil. We'll launch her in a mug of dark and watch the good beer come swirlin' and foamin' up these grimy cellar walls. (And it'll be the first good bath they've had since they were built.)

"We'll have our own ship under us that night, Lil. We'll sail her away on a racing tide, and our first port o' call will be *High Barbaree!*"

He shouted the last with gusto. And Lil's eyes glowed, she was so happy. And Karl slammed down his bar towel and told Rorrity that he'd either lower his voice or get out.

Karl owned the bar, and he hated Rorrity.

He didn't know he hated the Irishman. Karl was a tall, sour man who wore horn rimmed glasses and considered hatred beneath him. He considered quite a few things beneath him—including his second wife, to whom he now paid large sums of money for alimony in consequence, and it made his disposition even sourer.

If Karl could have afforded to choose his customers—and he couldn't—he would have preferred the artists, folk singers and students who hang out on North Beach for his clientelle. But he was too far out on the outskirts of North Beach to attract them. Besides, they never had any money. Rorrity, at least, spent his disability check in Karl's bar.

Karl, at times, could just barely stand the sight of Rorrity. But he was always quite careful never to let the Irishman know that. Rorrity was battered but still husky and Karl—well, Karl thought of himself as a disinterested and, most certainly, a non-violent intellectual.

Rorrity had never been asked but, if he had been, he'd have told you that Karl was one of his best friends. And that was the best reason, perhaps, why Karl despised the loud talking ex-fisherman.

So much for the characters.

Their story—what little there is of it—begins and ends on a cold and wet San Francisco night.

The weather outside was miserable. It was a fine, light and persistent rain that made the cellar bar even more damp than usual. The cold had penetrated inside, so Rorrity sat with the collar of his pea coat buttoned while Lil hunched on the last stool of the bar, which was the one closest to the stove.

Karl, who was both bored and ir-

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ritated, quietly polished a glass.

Rorrity was talking as usual. He was on his favorite subjects: boats and Brandy Wallace.

As he listened to Rorrity's gravelled tones—and he was forced to listen since, in the quiet of the near-empty bar, the fisherman's voice was a muted boom, as soft but inescapable as the noise of surf—as he listened, Karl steadily grew more and more irritated. His hands had wrapped the towel around the glass he held, and they were now trying to strangle it. He smiled quickly, just in case Lil or Rorrity had noticed anything other than themselves, and set the glass down.

His irritation lacked a target. Since Rorrity was the only customer, he couldn't give Lil the quiet and low-voiced hell he usually did whenever he thought her attentions were too fixed on the fisherman. (He and Lil had frequent fights on that subject, but only when the Irishman wasn't around, and neither ever mentioned their fights to Rorrity.)

An idea struck Karl just then. It wasn't a particularly nice one. He'd just been given a way to stop Rorrity's maudlin yapping about boats, once and for all. If the Irishman were reduced to a silent drinker, he might even be tolerable—Karl felt—and Lil's little rebellions would be over; she might even become an effective B-girl, in time.

Karl picked up another glass, ready and poised to catch an opening in Rorrity's non-stop conversation. By this time, the smile on his face was genuine.

Rorrity was saying. ". . . And while a hundred and fifty dollars don't amount to much, Brandy was the best, most generous friend. I ever had. You'll see, Lil. Brandy will be lookin' for me to pay us thousands for me little bit of help."

With every appearance of innocence, Karl chose that moment to ask: "When did you spend a hundred and fifty dollars on brandy, Roarey? Was that before you switched to beer?"

So used was Rorrity to talking in his selected groove that it was a moment before he realized he'd been interrupted. Indeed, he'd told his story of Brandy Wallace so many times that, to him, the words themselves had acquired a sort of rough polish—like the patina on the handle of a well-used marlinspike.

He stopped and raised his head. "And what is it yer talkin' about?" he asked Karl with an incredulous grin. "I'm certain you know of the thousands Brandy Wallace owes me, and will giv', as soon as—"

"Oh, *that* Brandy," Karl answered. "I should have known what you were talking about. God knows, I've heard it all often enough. You're like a record, Roarey. I should know by now you'll never pick a fresh topic for talk."

Rorrity sat at the bar with his mouth open. So he needn't see the

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Irishman's offended expression, Karl looked off into the middle distance behind Rorrity's head. Thoughtfully, he said: "There's a cute folk song about brandy. Heard it last week. I'll think of it in a minute."

"Never mind yer cute folk song," Rorrity replied with slow but rising dignity. "Just tell me what yer meant callin' me a record. I been thinkin' all this long time that you and me were friends. Am I wrong, Karl?"

Lilly caught the hurt tones in Rorrity's voice. Instantly, she said, "He didn't mean to be nasty, Danny. It was just something that slipped out. Accidental, like."

As he turned to face her, Rorrity's rust-gray eyebrows rose in slow astonishment. "*Accidental,* Lil? Meanin' it's on everybody's minds, an' they're just too polite to say so? Why, Lil, I'd never've believed that was what you been all this time thinkin'. You think I talk overmuch about one thing, too."

Lilly realized, belatedly, that her choice of words had been a mistake. "Oh, *no,* Danny. I don't think anything like that. What I meant was—"

Rorrity patiently waited for her to finish her sentence. But Lil could not do it. She was at a loss for words that would explain how she really felt without, at the same time, doing further injury to his feelings.

Rorrity waited her out. His eyebrows had climbed until they were a rusted gray bar under the bill of his cap. At last, when it was obvious she had no more to say, Rorrity grinned—but tentatively, as if he were trying the expression on to see how it fit.

"Ah, well there now," he said at last, holding his grin and getting it firm. "I don't think we need say any more."

Lil bit her lip. "Danny—" she began. He didn't let her finish.

"No, no," he said, still grinning. "Now enough has been said. It seems, perhaps, I'm just the littlest bit of a maniac—talkin' as I always am about me boat. Well, yer both me friends and I won't do it again. Me good friends are not the people I want to bore."

The face he turned to Karl had deep smile lines set into the weathered skin. "Tonight, we'll talk about somethin' different. Tell me about that folksong yer were mentionin'."

"Certainly, Roarey." And Karl quoted the triplet:

" 'What are old men made of?
'Whiskey and brandy and anything handy,
'That's what old men are made of.' "

Rorrity's smile grew uncertain. "I don't quite understand yer humor, Karl. What does it mean?"

Karl sighed and made a small, fractional adjustment to his glasses.

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"It means, Roarey, that some men when they grow old hold themselves together with lush. They strap themselves up with booze. And the liquor tells them they are still young. It's sad, Roarey. As a bartender, I see lots of it. They're kidding themselves.

"I also see some who've kidded themselves so well that they're now able to believe, like little children, in fairy tales."

"And what the hell is it yer mean?" Karl was taken aback. Coals of anger were coming to blaze in the Irishman's eyes. Karl didn't realize that his own subtlety had put him in the way of trouble with the ruggedly built fisherman. Rorrity had completely misunderstood his meaning.

He reared up from his stool. It went over backward, clattering and rolling off into the dark shadows of the bar.

His voice burst into a roar. "First I'm a record, and now it's a *fairy* ye call me?" He waved a fist as knotted and hard as an oak knurl under the astonished bartender's nose. "That's a hell of a way to be talkin'— And with a lady present at that!"

The fist drew back like a piston head.

Karl threw up his open hands. "Wait!"

Behind them, Lil giggled. "Oh, give him a chance to wiggle off the hook, Danny. He's terrified of you. And, like, besides I really don't think he meant to say what you think he said."

Karl shot her one quick look of hatred. But he masked it instantly as Rorrity turned back to face him.

"Roarey—" Karl said in great haste, "As usual, you've completely misunderstood what I've said."

"Don't call me that," Rorrity told him with an edged voice.

"Don't call you what?"

"'Roarey.' I don't like it from you, Karl. To you, I'm Rorrity."

"Whatever you say," Karl quickly agreed. "But just let me tell you this, Rorrity. The only reason you want to hit me is because I'm trying to help you. You won't face reality, Rorrity, but it's something you'll have to face if you ever want to do yourself or Lil any good."

Karl stopped to catch a quick breath before he went on. As a precautionary measure, he'd already stepped further back behind the bar and out of range of Rorrity's fists. (From the close look he'd just been given, he now knew that not all the scars on those knuckles had come from simple fishing.)

He noted, quickly, that Rorrity's expression was slipping from anger into puzzled concern. "You won't want to listen to me, Rorrity, but if you're a man you should.

"You and Lil are like two little children. Both of you are hanging your lives on some sort of absurd fantasy. It isn't healthy for either of you. In fact, it's sick."

Karl's superior smile was almost

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wholly back in place by now. He kept talking. "Rorrity—let's just examine the facts for a minute. When did you loan your money to this 'Brandy' fellow?"

Rorrity lowered his chin and scowled. "Around ten years ago. It was just before my accident. When I began drawin' the unemployment."

"Ah, yes." Karl nodded. "Your disability compensation."

Rorrity winced.

"When is he going to pay you back? Did he sign a note? Do you know where he is—or even if he is still alive?"

"He's alive," Rorrity said shortly. "And neither of us needed a note. We were friends."

"But he didn't even set a time limit by which he'd pay you back. What sort of friend was he?"

"A damn good one!" Rorrity barked. "And don't yer talk like that. I don't like it!"

Karl only smiled and waited for an answer.

Rorrity's heavy shoulders slumped. "He said—Brandy did—he said he'd pay me back within a year or two." His voice was almost inaudible. "Brandy promised to pay me the money he'd borrowed. And he said if his idea caught on we'd both split on his proceeds."

He straightened. "Karl—if his idea ever hit, why, Brandy would've made thousands! The tuna seiners need that idea—"

"Roarey! Listen to me! He promised to pay you *eight* years ago! *Where is he?*"

"Well—I hurt my back—I wasn't working down by the docks much. I guess—I guess he just lost track of me." The ex-fisherman's shoulders settled into defeat. He sat down heavily at the bar.

"Pull me another draught, will you, Karl?"

"Of course—Roarey."

Rorrity stared silently into his foamed glass for awhile. Lil sat quiet beside him. He sighed.

Lil said something, she never remembered what; it was merely an attempt at conversation.

"I'm not much for talkin' right now, Lil. There's some thinkin' I've got to do."

"I'm sorry, Danny."

He patted the back of her hand clumsily. "Never mind."

The minutes passed. Lil hugged her arms to her breasts. She said, "It's so quiet in here."

"So it is." He got up from his stool. "I'm going to walk around a bit, Lil. There's some things I ought to get done. I'll see you tomorrow, all right?

"Call me 'Roarey,' Lil. Everyone else does."

He walked up the stairs, slowly turning the collar of his pea coat up.

He was back in twenty minutes, talking, laughing, as excited and voluble as a child. But for once, Rorrity's cap was not on his head.

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That was because it was in his hand. He was waving it. And it was filled to its brim with green, rain-soaked bills.

"It's thousands, Lil!" Rorrity yelled as he grabbed her up and danced around the bar. "Thousands, just like I said it'd be! *We've got our boat!*"

He fell into a chair, pulling her down on his lap, and—not even bothering to catch his breath—he told her how it had happened.

"—So I thought to myself that, if Brandy didn't know where to find me, then it was high time I commenced lookin' for him. I went down to the docks. The rain's lifted and there's a white, billowin' fog blowin' in.

"It's a magic night for sure, Lil.

"You know I almost walked right past him? I ain't been down to the quays in years. But he's comin' in here tomorrow. The whole tuna fleet's docked down there, and he owns almost half of it!"

Rorrity stopped talking and finally took a breath. "Sweet Lord, but I couldn't be happier. The places we'll *see* together. Ah, but I love you, Lil," he said.

Lil's eyes shone.

And Karl twisted his bar towel into a murderous knot. Karl was outraged. For as long as he could remember, a cool and cynical computer had ticked steadily away at the back of his mind; it was composed of equal parts prejudice and probability, but it was the closest Karl could come to a sense of justice. And now—by an outrageous stroke of fortune—the drunken, maudlin old fisherman had just thumbed his nose at Karl, at all sober and cautious judgements, and most especially at Karl's ideal of a rational world.

He noticed, with detachment, that he was grinding his teeth. He *hated* Rorrity.

"Sweet Lord, but we must celebrate this!" Rorrity boomed. "Rounds for us all, Karl. Good rounds of dark! We'll seal Luck's sweet kiss with steam beer on our lips. We're three dear friends and must drink to our luck!"

He swung Lil off his lap and jumped to his feet. A stab of pain shot down his lamed back. He froze, then he grinned weakly.

"Ooof! It's a little old I am for dancin' . . ." He waved Lil's anxious arm off and crossed to the bar. "Never mind, darlin'— We still can drink."

Coldly, Karl set out three large mugs of dark. "That's right, Roarey. You can always drink. I guess you'll be doing lots of it now, with thousands of dollars to spend."

Rorrity pushed his cap back—but gingerly, wary of awakening the pain in his back again. He grinned. "Yer daft, Karl. Spend our thousands on draught? Man, we've got a boat to buy!"

"Oh, come off it, Rorrity! Those kiddy-tales were fine when you

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were poor, but you don't need them anymore. Act your age for once!"

Rorrity's eyebrows arched. "What?" He tried to straighten himself—and winced.

Satisfied, Karl smiled pure venom. "You couldn't row a dorry. You're too stove in. Do you honestly think you can haul up a sail?"

Rorrity slumped into an easy position at the bar. "What are ye talkin' about now?" His voice was honestly bewildered. "I'm as good a man as I ever was. Maybe some better. I'm fit. There isn't a ship afloat I can't work.

"You know that, and so does Lil. I just been waitin' for the right chance to ship out ag'in. And now it's here."

Karl slapped his own forehead in disgust. "My God, he's told the same lie so many times, he believes it himself!" He turned and talked earnestly to the ex-fisherman.

"Now just listen to sense for a minute, Rorrity. You were *disabled*. Ten years ago you were hurt too badly ever to work on another boat. No one gets stronger or healthier after they're forty, Rorrity. You certainly haven't. You've compounded the problem by becoming a lush.

"I don't know how much beer your little boat will carry—or how you think you'll ever be sober enough to navigate her—but I do know your thirst. If you don't stow enough beer aboard to sink you, you'll never reach your first port!"

Like red-tipped snakes, Lil's fingernails struck for his eyes. He dodged back and dabbed at a tiny rivulet of blood that had opened along the bridge of his nose. He smiled at her.

"You are fired," he said cooly.

Rorrity's voice was tired. "Leave him alone, Lil. He ain't worth botherin' over." His eyes raised and met Karl's.

"She's quittin' yer employment," he said. "And comin' with me on our boat. She'll make a fine hand."

Karl's self control finally deserted him. "*Her?* O-Ha-Ha-Ha!

"I can see Lil out in the sunlight and fresh air. She'd crack up or blow away. She wouldn't last out the first day!

"You know why, Rorrity? She's been too busy hustling for the bars. That bag hasn't seen daylight in years!"

To Lil, Rorrity said quietly: "I beg yer apologies, love. I see yer idea was the right one to begin with."

And, without rising from his seat, the meaty back of his right hand clubbed Karl across the face. Bottles from the back bar sprayed up in a fountain of broken glass as the bartender smashed into them. Karl hung there for a moment, an incredulous look on his face—then, folding slowly at the middle, he pitched forward onto his face.

Karl was out.

Grinning, Rorrity blew out his breath over his knuckles, as if to

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help the hand cool. "That's better now! Step over him and pour me another dark, Lil. There's a bit of thinkin' we now must do."

As she handed him the full glass, Rorrity gently patted the top of the bar stool next to him. "Sit down, darlin', and let me think." He still grinned but his teeth were clenched. His spine had become a hollow tube of pain.

He drank and thought and then drank some more. The pain was almost gone and he felt the power on him when he finally said:

"Well, darlin', did the man say anything other than the truth?"

Lil looked down at Karl's inert form with cold ice in her eyes. "No," she answered him.

"You still want to go with me—On our boat?"

"More than you'll ever know, Danny, I want it so bad."

He blew out his breath. "Right." He took out the tiny ship's model and placed it in the brown dregs of his glass.

"I just hope it works, darlin'. They've left us with little else."

On the floor, Karl groaned. He was having the damndest dream. He was drowning. The surface was far above him, but the foam that scudded across its top was a familiar brown.

Around him, Rorrity's voice reverberated, strangely young and vigorous. "There's land over there. Set sail, Lil. It's High Barbaree!"

Karl floundered, and the dream exploded. He woke on the liquor-wet duckboards behind his bar. Rorrity and Lil were gone.

He saved their thousands in beer-drenched bills for about a month before he spent it. He bought off his second wife and opened a pizza parlor. He was still afraid of Rorrity's fists long after the money was spent. He needn't have bothered.

Neither Rorrity or Lil ever came back.

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John Tomerlin's background is in radio writing and broadcasting, and he has published a book for young people called PRISONER OF THE IROQUOIS. *Which is all slightly misleading in relation to this first-rate horror story about an unscrupulous archeologist and his apalling discovery in the foothills of the Bas Alpes.*

WHITE NIGHT

by John Tomerlin

KOELER HAD WAITED TOO LONG before turning back. It had been late afternoon when he'd discovered the small road, unknown to him and not shown on any of his maps, and had begun to follow it. Now the day had faded, foreshortened by the surrounding hills, and thunderclouds had appeared suddenly to blot up the remaining light. Moments later the rain began, and the lower layers of the clouds themselves settled around him in a dense curtain. It was dangerous to continue in such conditions and Koeler knew it, but he'd made up his mind to return to Cannes that night and he was a stubborn man.

He drove cautiously, nursing the expensive German sedan over ruts and holes in the pavement which seemed already to be deepening in the downpour. Once or twice he came to forks he did not remember and finally was forced to admit he was lost. The danger of mudslides was increasing and there was even a possibility of driving over the side in the obscurity. The wisest course would have been to stop where he was and wait for the worst to pass, but he went on in hopes of finding a village and shelter for the night.

As he drove he cursed his stupidity. At this moment he could have been enjoying dinner at some fine resort hotel, beginning a conversation with some agreeable young French girl, looking forward to an evening of pleasure. If only he'd picked another day for his expedition he'd be doing

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just that, instead of blundering around the dreary foothills of the Bas Alpes. Still, he owed much to his previous visits here. The little stone villages perched above the Riviera were rich fields for a trained archeologist. The Greeks had been here, centuries before, and then the Romans. The Germanic invaders had come and the Moslem pirates. Each had left traces of their passage, weapons and utensils, temples and shrines to their dead, objects of value to be found. He had found some in the past. The fact that he owed such discoveries to his university didn't disturb Koeler in the least. A man could not be expected to live on the salary of an associate professor, not when there were those in Marseille or Genova so eager to pay for what he found. No, he could regret the time he'd spent in these hills no more than he could regret the car he drove, the clothes he wore, the good hotels he stayed in.

Impossible to go farther. He'd reached this decision when, as though by chance, a pocket in the road caused the car to jolt and the upward flare of the headlights to catch the shape of a building. An auberge. He turned off to the side, locked his car, and hurried to the front door.

It was the usual sort of building one found in the hill villages, tall and narrow, extremely old, constructed entirely of stone gathered from the slopes so that it was the color and texture of the land itself—like the accidental architecture of nature. The door of heavy timbers was studded with brass nailheads in the shape of a diamond and supported a large hinged knocker. Koeler sounded and as he was waiting he glanced up at the sign above his head. It read, *La Vieille Dame.*

Indeed it was a very old woman, holding a lamp in one hand, who opened the door to him. He told her he needed lodgings for the night, and at her nod he went inside.

A narrow foyer of vaulted stone reached back from the entry to a stone staircase that led to the upper floors. On the right an arch opened by two steps to the door to the main rooms. It was cold and damp and the walls glistened with moisture. There was no light other than the one the old woman was carrying, but as she turned to lead the way a flickering beam fell into the deeper shadows beneath the staircase. It framed so unexpected an object that Koeler almost cried out in surprise. With a gesture he arrested the old woman, took the light from her and went closer to what he'd seen. Standing on one end, its back against the crumbling wall, was a sarcophagus. It was Roman, dating from about 600, and though the seal was broken the case itself was almost perfect.

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There could be no mistake. Koeler was an expert on the period. As he knelt closer he could see the carvings clearly raised, the remaining traces of the dyes, inscriptions in Latin still legible on the base. He knew others had been found in the north and west but this was the first he'd ever heard of to be located in the perched villages; it was genuine and the finest of its sort he'd ever seen. It was priceless.

He rose abruptly, making of his face a mask. "Would it be possible," he asked, "for me to have something to eat?"

The salon of the auberge was a large room with raftered ceiling and dark-paneled walls. Cracks ran randomly between the beams, here and there concealed by age-worn tapestries. Though he'd seen no light from outside he found a large and comfortable fire burning in the hearth. Beside it sat an old man with a rug wrapped around his body, bony hands protruding along the arms of his chair.

"Evil weather," the old man muttered, "evil."

Koeler took off his rain-soaked coat and went nearer the fire. "It's good to be inside, I'm glad you had room for me." He hesitated. "There are—others here?"

The old man shrugged. "It is not the season."

The woman came to tell him his food was ready. He went into the dining room, a cheerless place in the guttering light of lamps. Apparently there was no electricity here at all. The room contained half a dozen rough-carved tables, only one of which had been spread; linen, silver and candles, ready for his meal. No sooner was he seated than a serving girl began bringing his food, dishes of great variety exquisitely prepared. He asked for wine and was served a remarkable Provence rose, perfectly chilled. For a moment he wondered that everything should be so good, as though he'd been expected, then forgot to wonder in his enjoyment.

Moreover, he'd become aware that his attendant was a peasant girl of surprising beauty. Dressed in the coarse black garments of the paysanage, raven-black hair disordered, she'd made no impression at first. Now as she leaned near the glow of candles on the table to change his plate he could see her better. The even oval of her face, slightly tilting eyes with long dark lashes, bold mouth and nose, skin a faint olive cast. There was something exotic, foreign, about her beauty; the echo of some long forgotten strain, perhaps, repeating itself in the simple country girl. As he studied her she looked up and he saw what might have been a sign of interest in him, and thought: There is more than one prize worth winning here.

He took his coffee in the main

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room with his hosts. He was pleased to see that the girl remained with them, sitting on a cushion at one corner of the stone hearth. Who she could be puzzled him, though; the granddaughter of the old couple? Some other relation. Certainly not their daughter, she was too young, and yet something about her made it hard to judge her age. Later he would find out more about her, but at the moment he had other things on his mind.

"I saw," he began, "as I came in, the carved box you have." He addressed himself to the old man, thinking this to be correct, and taking care to choose his words. "It was found near here?"

"Yes. I found it, yes. *La bas*—" one pale hand fluttered to indicate the direction. "In the ground where one goes for stones."

"And wasn't there a chest . . . a chest of stone?"

The old man nodded. "She—" he jerked his head toward the woman, "—she wanted the chest. To wash in. She didn't want the other, but I brought it. I said it would interest people. I was right, eh? It interests you?"

Koeler paused to light a cigarette. The old devil was shrewd, already he sensed something. Still, to use the chest for *washing!* —they could have no idea of its value. "A friend of mine collects such things," he said.

"A friend of his," the old man told the woman.

"The box has been opened I think," Koeler said. "Did you open it?"

His host stopped smiling. "Yes . . . once."

"You saw what was inside?"

"*Rags*! Old rags . . . nothing more."

"You didn't—"

"No! I did nothing!"

Koeler almost sighed in relief. "If nothing has been damaged, then my friend might be interested. I might buy it for him, you see."

"Buy it?"

"Perhaps I'm making a mistake. There are many such boxes and this one may have no value. Still . . . I might give you . . . fifty francs."

"No."

Koeler shrugged. "Say sixty, then."

"It is . . . not for sale."

"What? An old box! . . . Worthless! . . . I will pay seventy francs, not more."

The old man only pursed his thin lips and looked away into the fire.

He could not understand. He'd expected some bargaining but not this cold refusal. This sudden silence as though fear had fallen into the room. What could the thing mean to them, that they were so determined to keep it? No matter, he could change their minds, he must.

"Listen," he said, and he made

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his voice threatening, "do you know what is inside that box?"

The old man's head jerked toward him, eyes widening.

"I will tell you. There is a body in the box, a human body wrapped in the rags. It is the body of a woman, an evil woman belonging to a strange and powerful race. Centuries ago she died and was buried this way with terrible spells and curses."

He saw with pleasure the effect his words produced. The terror. Ignorant and superstitious, they would end by begging him to take it away. Not even an effort of the imagination was required; the story of a woman of high birth, exiled for her infidelity, with some supposed power over men—he'd seen it all in the carvings and the inscriptions on the sarcophagus. He told them all of it and when he was finished said, "And *that* is the thing you keep in your house with you!"

The old man was trembling with emotion, his mouth working soundlessly. At last he looked hopelessly toward the young girl sitting on the hearth, as though she might say something to help him. But she said nothing and merely sat, the reflection of the flames flickering deep in her eyes, a faint smile at her lips.

"Yes," the old man whispered. "Yes . . . the thing is yours."

Koeler hid his triumph. "I am tired," he said.

"Take m'sieur to his room."

The girl rose and got a key from the row of pegs on one wall. She looked to see that he was following and then led him out. The foyer was damp and chill after the warmth of the fire. Koeler caught a glimpse of the sarcopagus as they started up the stairs, and shivered slightly.

But his thoughts were no longer of the artifact, his mind was too efficient for that, the matter was settled and he was free now to think of the girl. What a drab existence this would be, trapped here in the little auberge for—God knew how long. He'd been aware, all the time he'd been talking, that she was watching him; had felt her eyes even when he couldn't see them. What had she been thinking, and what was it she would want? Escape? Yes, she might see in him the chance of getting away . . . and for that matter, why not? It would be amusing to see her in a fine gown, her hair done properly, and he could afford to make such promises now. Following her up the stairs he admired, beneath the shabby dress, the fineness of her figure.

His room was on the second *etage*, which surprised him. He knew there must be empty rooms on the floor below . . . but perhaps she wanted to place him as far away from the old couple as possible. This thought pleased him. At the door to the room she turned

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and gave him his key and the lamp, and he put an arm around her slender waist and pressed her to him. She smiled, then pulled away and disappeared down the dark corridor. He wasn't worried. He was sure she'd be back.

The room was small and smelled of disuse. Greenish paper the color of mold peeled from the walls and the ceiling was a damp and dirty brown. One window looked out upon a narrow court behind the building, and storm-driven rain lashed the pane like thrown pebbles. Lightning flared and was followed by thunder. Koeler undressed quickly and got into the iron-frame bed, leaving the lighted lamp on the table.

Vague questions troubled him. What was this auberge doing here, neither on the main highway nor a part of one of the actual villages? How did these people live? And, ignorant as they undoubtedly were, they should have had some idea what the sarcophagus was; why had they kept it inside the house? Either he'd been extraordinarily lucky, or . . .

He heard a noise outside his door, then saw the girl enter his room silently on naked feet. She hesitated a moment inside the door as though surprised by the light, eyes wide, lips slightly parted, breathing heavily. She blew out the lamp and he heard the soft pad of her feet coming toward him. Lightning flashed and framed for one incredible instant the most perfect body he'd ever seen, and then she was beside him.

Some time later, he didn't know how long, Koeler woke.

He was lying on his side, facing the window. The storm had passed as suddenly as it had come and left behind a brilliant moon that flooded the room. Perhaps it was this that had awakened him.

He didn't think so.

It was unusual for him not to sleep the night, and now he had a feeling which was difficult to explain but which was like the awareness of danger. Like a dog smelling smoke, a warning of something wrong. It seemed terribly important to understand what it was and so he began to review in his mind the events of the day, the storm, the unlikely little auberge, the sarcophagus. Was it possible his subconscious had been disturbed by the legend he'd read there, the ancient tale of a woman with the power to make men think her beautiful until, after love, they saw her as she really was? Unlikely. He was not the imaginative sort; and yet—just remembering it was like touching an open nerve. He realized he was afraid.

And then, of course, there'd been the girl. She'd come to his room—it could not have been more than a couple of hours ago—and he'd been amazed by the ferocity of her passion, like a creature starved. She was still there, lying

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behind him, of this he was sure. He was sure and yet it was this doubt that grew in his mind until it had driven away all other. He could hear no sound of respiration, but could feel a weight beside him. All he had to do of course was turn and look. The sweat on his forehead and under his arms was cold. The room was cold. The bed behind him was cold.

In terror he started up, onto one elbow. At the movement he heard a faint sigh. For another moment it remained impossible for him to turn his head, and in this moment he heard a voice next to him—a whisper that was like the rustle of wind in dry, decaying leaves.

"So . . . long . . ." the voice said, not in French but in a much older language which he also understood. "It's been so . . . long . . . !"

Then Koeler turned and looked at the thing lying beside him.

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Julius Fast has written six mystery novels (one of which, WATCHFUL AT NIGHT, *won a Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" award). He is also a medical editor and writer, his most recent book being a non-fiction work on genetics,* BLUEPRINT FOR LIFE. *The story below might be described as a "realistic fantasy." It is certainly one of the most graphic treatments of an encounter with Satan that we have seen in quite a while.*

GROW OLD ALONG WITH ME

by Julius Fast

ACTUALLY, IT ALL STARTED with an offhand remark, a remark I never really meant. I was young, hardly 18 and always spoiling for a fight—verbal or physical. It didn't matter if I was usually wrong. The fun of the argument was what I was after. I was big, raw-boned and good looking, and my mind was as alert as my body.

That year Charlie Watson and I had both been trying to beat each other out with pretty Peggy Talbert. Peg had spent an hour one pleasant spring afternoon playing one of us against the other, and then she had flounced out of the ice cream parlor with two girl friends, her long ruffled skirt giving us the most tantalizing glimpse of a pair of pretty ankles.

Charlie leaned his chair back on two legs and pushed his straw boater up on his head, then he arranged the crease in his narrow trousers. It's funny that way back at the turn of the century they were wearing trousers just as tight as they are now.

"That woman is almost as bad as the devil," he muttered. "She'll lead a man right to hell."

I admired the knowledgeable way he delivered the line, but I didn't give an inch. "Oh, I don't know."

He looked at me in amusement. "What don't you know, Kovacs?"

I had to come up with something good, preferably a little shocking. "I don't know why you assume the devil is all bad."

He lifted one eyebrow, a trick I knew he'd spent days practicing and I went on casually. "For sheer

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malice the devil can't hold a candle to a girl like Peggy. In fact," I had found my road and I began to elaborate, "all in all, the devil is much maligned. Every literary reference to the man makes him out a perfect gentleman, yet always gotten the best of. The Faust story —sure, the doctor had it coming to him, but who got the raw deal? Old Satan. No. Charlie, I say that the devil is a good man and I for one will stick up for him."

"Well, you do that!" Charlie laughed and stood up. "Kovacs, you're a crazy galoot. Where you get your ideas . . ." but there was admiration in his voice and I smirked in self-satisfaction.

I was heading home a bit later when a pleasant-faced stranger in a formal black suit and high hat fell into step besides me. "I want to thank you, Mr. Kovacs."

I was startled. "You're welcome, but I'm afraid I don't . . . that is . . ." I hated to admit that I didn't know him. That was pretty embarrassing when he knew my name.

He didn't give me much help, just grinned a bit shyly, but a nice grin.

"You have the advantage of me," I added with what I hoped was adult dignity.

His grin grew wider. "But I won't take it. Surely you recognize me."

The nice easy way he spoke put me at my ease. All at once it didn't seem so bad, not knowing who he was, because in a way I did know him. It was on the tip of my tongue.

"You stood up for me today and very nicely too."

"I stood up for you?"

"Yes, of course." He lifted his hat and I saw two pink horns poking out of his curly black hair. "Satan, Eddie. I really should have calling cards. It would make this much easier. Take a deep breath."

You know, I was so stunned I could hardly do anything but obey. I filled my lungs and instantly began to cough.

"Sulphur and brimstone" Satan said with a little-boy expression of delight. "'Cleans the nasal passages, doesn't it?"

I straightened up and said, "Look, a joke is a joke, but—"

He didn't answer but he stopped smiling and stared at me and his eyes—there was something about his eyes—they were black, a deep, deep black, the kind of black that had no end to it—and maybe no beginning. I knew right then for sure and my legs just buckled under me. We were on a broad, tree-lined street, the houses set far back with wide lawns and porches and I could see girls with long white dresses rocking in wicker rockers while laughter, thin and sweet, floated under the trees. Such an ordinary street!

I sat down on the curb and he sat beside me. "Put your head

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down, boy, between your legs and push up." He placed his hand on my head and I pushed against it, feeling the blood rush back to my face. "There. That will do it. Are you all right, Eddie?"

I licked my dry lips. "You really are Satan!"

"That's as silly as saying you really are Eddie Kovacs. Of course I'm Satan. Now here's my proposition . . ."

I put out my hand and touched his chest. "No. Now look, I may have stood up for you, but that was kind of like, well . . ."

"Oh come, don't spoil it all, you certainly did stand up for me."

"But I'm not making any deal. My soul is inviolate." I felt a little pompous, but awfully righteous.

He winced. "Dear, dear boy. I don't want your soul . . ." He paused and sighed. "There you are. Even you who stood up for me today, even you are a victim of the worst kind of predetermined judgement. Innocent until proven guilty. Now that's a laugh."

"I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand . . ." I faltered, but his voice was hurt.

"Be more than sorry. Be charitable. You've raised your voice in my behalf—now raise your prejudices."

"I don't . . ."

"You will. Now," he said brusquely, "Here's my proposition. I want to give you a gift, open, above-board, no strings attached and certainly no soul involved. Collect when you like."

It was so much like a dream, that wide, drowsy street, green under the trees, the laughter of girls on nearby porches, the tap of horses' hooves as a carriage drove past, a dream and yet so real! He wasn't at all what I'd always expected him to be. He was so—well, sincere.

"But why," I said slowly, staring surreptitiously at his head and the hidden pink horns. "Why a gift?"

"We went through that. You stood up for me."

"Really," I murmured, "I didn't mean to." Trying to disclaim what I had done made me feel ashamed of myself.

There was a long silence, then he picked up a pebble and tossed it into the road. "The horns are easy to hide," he said irrelevantly, but the tail is the very devil." He laughed at his own joke. "I have to tuck it between my legs and it gives me something of a pot belly here in front. I'm rather vain about my figure . . ." His voice trailed away. After a moment he went on, switching to what seemed to be another irrelevancy. "We're entering a century of enlightenment, achievement is the word. Progress. That big steel bridge they're building in New York, steel and stone and how long before they fly and after that, what? The planets? The stars?" He sighed. "Civilization bubbles like a glass of beer with a

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head of technical advances. But what about the body, the culture of the nation, the moral values and standards?" He wet his lips. "All that talk of beer! Are you old enough to have a glass?"

"Of course," I said indignantly. Then I frowned, "It's sort of—well, strange, hearing you talk about moral values and standards."

He shrugged and stood up, giving me his hand to help me to my feet. "You all right now?"

"I guess so."

We walked along slowly, past the residential section of town and out along Main Street. "I've always been concerned with moral values. Let morality go hang and where would I be. . . . But your defense of me, you think you didn't mean it, yet subconsciously you did. Freud hasn't fully developed it yet, but most of it is there. Subconsciously you believed what you said or you'd never have said it. I know a defense when I hear one. Ah! Flanagan's Saloon." He pushed open the swinging doors and I looked around guiltily, then followed him in, hoping I wouldn't be recognized. The bartender, however, hardly even noticed me. In the corner someone was playing a soft sad song on a piano that needed tuning.

"Now the gift I had planned is a sort of perennial youth."

"Perennial youth?"

"Obviously, I won't offer you anything as rare as immortality, even to the ends of time as we know it. That's rather grandiose. Oh, not that I haven't done it; but then it's for payment received, and there are all sorts of ritualistic deals involved."

"You mean my soul?"

His hand tightened around the beer. "Prejudice," he murmured softly. "No. Again you wouldn't understand. Eternal youth, I call that gift and it's rather a chimera. This one is a cosmetic approach. I can't extend your lifetime. After all . . ." he shrugged expressively. "But while you live I'll make you look like seventeen and feel like seventeen, with the body of a seventeen year-old." He smiled a bit wickedly over his beer, "And of course, the libido of a seventeen year old."

I felt my ears redden. There was a sore point. How many nights had I lain awake, my whole body burning with unconsumated desire? Oh no, I wouldn't buy that. What a terrible trap!

I shook my head. "I'm a kid. No matter how I throw my weight around, I'm still a kid. I have to fight for respect, watch my step with the older guys and as for the girls I want . . ." I thought of Peggy Talbert, "Well, they don't see me for dust. Not at seventeen."

He sipped the beer slowly. "It doesn't have to be seventeen. Suppose I come back ten years from now. By then you'll be ready for it.

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"Ten years." I nodded. "That would do it. By then I'd know enough. I'd really be a man." Twenty-seven was just right. I smiled at him to take the sting away from my doubt. "No strings?"

"Really!" He seemed hazy all of a sudden, almost translucent. His lips pouted and I could hear a whispered, "Prejudice," in a bitter tone. Then everything about him, except the pout, was gone and finally that drifted away too and I just sat there, staring at the two beers. At least till the bartender spotted me and thundered out, "Eddie Kovacs? What are you doing here? Beat it before the cops get after me."

I hurried out, my beer hardly tasted, and I walked down the street in a haze of bewilderment.

It was exactly ten years. I had been out of law school for three years and I was practicing on East Barrow Street in my home town, Wisnesh Falls. Sam Rosen, Dick Parks and myself, we had all gone through school together and now we shared a set of offices, four rooms in a row. You had to go through Sam's office to get to Dick's, and through Sam's and Dick's to get to mine. Someday, we told ourselves, we'd have a place with all our rooms off a central hall, and Lilly Esteber would be in the hall instead of the fourth office. Lilly was the secretary-typist for Rosen, Parks and Kovacs, Attorneys-at-Law, and also the object of bitter competition between Sam and Dick. Myself, I had been married to Mary for three years now and we had two little boys, but I could still appreciate Lilly's pretty blond looks as well as her efficient work.

Well, it was after five and I had just leaned back with a cigar in my mouth for that moment of rest before I left the office. I was fumbling in my pocket for a match when there was a flare of light in front of my eyes. I drew back, and then felt cold down the length of my spine. He was sitting there, dressed in black, quite stylish, with a black Homburg on his head and black velvet lapels to his suit. His finger was extended and it was burning with a clear blue light. I think that little touch of fantasy was just enough to keep me from being too shaken. I wet my lips and glanced quickly at the door.

"Well, light the cigar and if anyone comes in I'm just a client."

I lit the cigar, trying to keep my hand steady. Then it had happened. It really had!

"You're probably surprised to see me."

"Surprised is hardly a word that fits. If Dick or Sam comes in, how can I explain you?"

"You'll think of something. That's what makes a successful lawyer, the ability to think on your feet, and you're headed for success."

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I forgot everything in the face of that remark. "Can you see the future?" I asked eagerly.

"Now, now." He took a cigar from my desk and lit it with his finger, then blew out the flame. "That's rather a showy stunt but I like it. See the future indeed! You have very little knowledge of time and space. The future isn't, my dear boy. It just isn't. How can I see it?"

"But you said . . ."

"An educated guess based on your progress, your aggressive personality and your adjusted view of life. Oh, I've checked up on you and I'm very satisfied, very. You're doing quite nicely."

"I've done it on my own," I said defensively.

"Indeed you have. At any rate, are you ready for my gift?"

"Ready? Well, I never thought of it in these past ten years. I suppose I didn't really believe it had happened and I've had so much to do . . ."

"Haven't we all?"

"I'm twenty-seven. I'd stay like this forever?"

"Correction, till you die. Forever is eternal youth, remember? You'll die at the age you normally would, seventy or eighty, but till then you'll look and feel twenty-seven."

"Still, twenty-seven is so young, young in terms of my profession. You see, what future is there for a twenty-seven-year-old, in law? I'd still be the junior partner. Politics—well, I've had my eye on politics for a while now. The machine in this city is so basically rotten. What I'd like to see . . ."

He listened carefully, shaking his head and now and then asking pointed, discerning questions. He genuinely cared what I was doing, what my plans were and I felt his personal concern with a warm pleasure. In the last few years, I suddenly realized I had made almost no real friends. Even Dick and Sam went their separate ways. They respected me, yes, but how much feeling was there behind the respect?

He looked at his watch and I broke off. "I'm sorry—boring you like this."

"Boring me? Ridiculous! I'm fascinated. I just checked to see if you wouldn't be late for dinner. Perhaps you'd better call Mary."

I had forgotten completely! I called and made some vague excuse, telling her I'd probably miss supper. When I hung up he looked at me keenly.

"You do that a lot."

"What?"

"Miss supper."

"Well, yes. I work hard though. It's not . . ." I winced as I thought of an unhappy scene with Mary last week. "Well, it's just business."

"Watch it though," he said kindly. "This devotion to work and success is the quickest way to

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ruin a marriage. I know. Now you have ambition, use it, but don't neglect the family." He ground out his cigar and started to become vague. Alarmed, I cried out, "Where are you going?"

He paused, a smoky ghost of a man, his voice thin but clear. "Spatially, that's hard to answer. The necessary physics haven't yet been worked out. I assume it's a co-existing plane of being, impinging on this world but not a part of it . . ."

"No, no," I stood up, "I mean, why are you going, so soon?"

"For a lawyer your thinking is a bit muddled." He chuckled and adjusted his suit, smoothing down the lapels. "You've made your decision. I'll be back in ten years."

I sat back as he vanished. "In ten years," I whispered. My own cigar had gone out and I tried to light it but I remembered the flame on his finger and I shivered, then put the dead cigar down.

I heard the door open and Lilly looked in. "Still here, Ed? I was locking up."

"I'll put the lights out." She looked around the office and sniffed. "Have you been playing with matches? There's a queer smell here."

"Is there? I hadn't noticed."

She sighed and left and I sat for a long time staring into space.

Thirty-seven, a good, robust age for a political figure. Mayor? Governor? Why not? He had said I was going far, that I would be successful. Surely he knew, in spite of his double talk about time. If I believed in the devil why not believe in prescience?

And I believed in the devil.

The year I was thirty-seven, I introduced what was probably the soundest piece of legislation on labor unions to be heard in Congress. It was defeated by an overwhelming majority, but the papers —oh how they played it up.

"Surely the most promising congressman this war-weary nation had yet produced," Mary read from the late edition of Washington's biggest newspaper. "Now what do you say to that."

"Fellow constituents . . ."

"Oh God!" My eleven-year-old boy threw up his hands. Alice, aged nine, looked at me witheringly. "Not another speech!"

Helplessly I turned to Mary. "A man is never a hero in his own home."

She was flipping through the paper, but was suddenly stopped by the drama page. "Well! Look what musical comedy is opening!"

They clustered around her, three blond heads, Mary's in the center and I looked at them proudly, then past them to the long window opening on the portico of our impressive Washington home. He was standing there, hands behind his back, staring out at the green sweep of lawn and the Potomac in

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the background. I swallowed and turned back to Mary and the kids. "I'll be back in a moment" I murmured, but they were too absorbed to pay attention.

"You haven't changed," I said as I walked up to him.

"Should I have? Some things are timeless."

"Or outside of time."

He turned quickly, giving me that shy but open smile that had first captivated me. "Well, Ed. Thirty-seven and the most promising Congressman. Think of it."

I sighed. "I've done little else."

"You've thought of me too."

"Yes, I have, on and off these ten years. Not merely the implication of your gift, but that it should be vouchsafed to me—I've faced my own growing maturity with an equally growing wonder."

He frowned. "I don't know if I like what time is doing to you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Pomposity should never be confused with wisdom. You try too hard. Come, let's take a walk."

For a while we walked in silence. My feelings were hurt, but in all fairness he was right. Finally he said, "Ed, I'm glad you're straightened out with Mary."

I looked at him quickly. "We're very much in love."

"That's good." The corner of his smile was a little crooked. Sardonic? "Politically expedient too?"

"I love Mary."

"I suppose you do. By the way, whatever happened to Lilly, your pretty little secretary?"

"She's still my pretty little secretary. Dick and Sam lost out on that."

He nodded thoughtfully. "Seriously, you're headed up, Ed and I'm glad."

I said, "Thanks," and for a while we walked on together. Then tentatively he began, "About my gift . . ."

I pointed across the rooftops to where the dome of the capital rose up. "I still don't want to be the kid in congress. I suppose I should say yes—"

"Why not? You could dye your hair grey, a little makeup . . ."

"And Mary? Could I fool her and my kids with makeup?"

"But what a waste Ed, what a waste."

"No, not really." I stood up straight, my shoulders back and my jaw firm. "Maturity is in the man, not in the body."

"Whatever that means." He shook his head sadly. "You must curb this tendency to pompousness. It sticks out like a sore thumb, and eventually it's bound to backfire."

I shrugged in embarrassment. "Well, you take on a certain style in the political rat-race . . ." My voice trailed off.

He patted my arm. "Now, now. You're doing fine. I did think thirty-seven a well-rounded age. Ma-

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ture and yet not old, a man's most vigorous time."

He smiled deprecatingly. "Myself, I stopped at thirty-seven."

I glanced at his sharply etched profile, the noble lift to the brow, the black eyes and the touch of sadness. "For you, yes," I said slowly, "but you're not tied up with politics."

"Am I not?" He wet his lips with a too pink tongue.

"Well, you know in what sense I mean."

He sighed and shoved his hat back, the two pink horns pushing up in front of it. "In ten years."

I watched him fade, wondering with a strange sense of loss, if I had done the right thing!

The next time I saw him was the year after that very bitter, very brutal campaign where I lost the presidential nomination. *The Boy Candidate*. The head of my own party had come out with a devastating statement a week before the primary. "In my opinion, Kovacs has plenty to learn yet!"

But then he always had hated my guts, ever since that blow-up on the labor union scandal.

I lost Mary that winter, and with her all direction, all purpose seemed to go out of my life. Even the children couldn't reach me. The very act of living was an effort, indeed I hardly think I would have gone on if it hadn't been for Lilly's untiring devotion.

I was going back to Kansas in the club car when I realized that Satan was sitting beside me. "It's guilt, really," he said with no preamble. "Actually, you feel that in some way you're responsible for Mary's death, that you've failed her."

"Go to the devil," I said.

"I don't know quite how to answer that." He smiled tolerantly. "Now come Ed, we've always been friends."

I looked at him distastefully. "If I've learned one thing in forty-seven years, it's the meaningless quality of friendship."

"Oh, but you're thinking of your political friends, each with his own ax to grind. True friendship asks nothing. Like mine—and Lilly's. Indeed it gives."

"Leave Lilly out of it."

"That's right out of an old melodrama. Ed, is forty-seven the age?"

"Forty-seven is hell," I said through clenched teeth. "Let me go on. What, by all that's holy, have I got at this age to make me cling to it?"

"How you mix your figures of speech, and I can't begin to answer by anything holy. Yours is not the first tragedy of all time," he added with some asperity.

I looked at him broodingly. He was still dressed in the latest style, black but not somber, not at all somber. "How is your research with time and space?"

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He looked blank, then laughed. "I don't research it Ed, I live it. You should look up some of those English astronomers, some fascinating ideas about the cosmos. Wouldn't He be amazed!" He shook his head, "Ed, I hate to see you like this. Destroyed, running away from Washington."

"It's only a visit," I said stiffly. I looked out the window for a moment, then burst out, "You know what he said, I 'have plenty to learn yet!' And that damned cartoonist on the Star did a picture of me playing with alphabet blocks, spelling out *economy*."

Satan chuckled. "Where's your sense of humor. Good heavens, Ed, beat them at their own game. Be the perennial boy candidate. I'll help."

"No thanks," I said stiffly, "I'll keep on."

"You have a Freudian fear of youth."

"And you have an unhealthy taste for snap analysis."

He slowly shook his head and pursed his lips. "We're just not hitting it off this time. In ten years."

In ten years! And I turned back to the window, broodingly.

"Surely," Satan said coaxingly, "you'll stop now."

"But what have I to gain?" I poured two glasses of brandy and handed one to him. He stared at it speculatively. "This is a pretty stiff shot."

Surprised, I looked at the amber liquor. "It's a good brandy—damned good, and with the Germans marching into France, God knows when we'll see another bottle of it."

"I liked the speech you made the other day about appeasement. You've gotten over that old tendency to pontificate."

"Well thank you." I smiled at him fondly . . . "And you seem to have changed too. There's—well, a more human quality to you, and that's surprising. I had an idea you were changeless."

"Nothing is. You should know that," he said reprovingly. "Besides, in times like these we cannot exist in a changeless state."

"Now *you've* taken to pontification." I reached out and put my hand on his arm. "Don't be offended, I was joking. But . . . well, damn it man, aren't you confused about whose side you're on?"

"I'm not one bit confused," he snapped. Then he sipped at his brandy. "It is good, though I can't abide drinking it from a tumbler."

"Lilly has some brandy snifters somewhere, but I think they've been made into planters."

He shuddered, then sipped at his drink again. "How is Lilly?"

"Lovely, as all brides are."

"Which brings me to the point of my visit. You're fifty-seven, close to sixty. Isn't it time you accepted my gift? This psychological procrastination . . ."

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"I hear that word psychological so often now, Satan. There's nothing psychological about it, nor is it procrastination."

"Then what is it?"

"Possibly it's human. Shall I take your gift now and cheat myself out of the most valuable thing left to me, my golden years as the sage of the party, the wise old man of American politics?"

"You're mocking me."

I looked up quickly. "Me? Mock at you? On my honor, I never would." I shook my head. "No, these years are suddenly terribly precious, the only real completion to my life."

"But Lilly . . ."

"Yes, but Lilly. Shall I let her walk on alone?"

"Still," there was a touch of coldness in his voice. A rejected gift hardly makes for friendship. "There is the matter of health. You've been blessed with the constitution of an ox, but you'll begin to run down soon."

"We all do," I said with a shrug.

He looked at the liquor. "I should suspect your liver will go first."

I chuckled. "Hardly. Isn't it usually the arteries?"

He threw up his hands. "I shall never understand humans."

I lifted my eyebrows, "Nor I devils." As he started to fade away I said, "Will I see you again?"

His eyes, so black and deep, studied mine and then he smiled softly, "I hope so, dear friend."

"Whistling," I said, staring into the fire, "is a lost art."

Satan smiled tolerantly. "A philosopher at seventy-seven. Is that your ambition?"

"In part. But you know, when I was a boy everybody whistled. You whistled at night, walking home. You whistled about the house. You whistled while you walked along. You even whistled in the shower."

"And now."

"Whoever whistles now? It's a lost art." I looked at him quizzically. "I missed you the last time around."

"I knew you wouldn't accept it."

"And now?"

"Call it a friendship call."

"Meaning you're pretty sure I won't be around ten years from now."

With a show of annoyance he said, "I once told you I couldn't see the future."

"So you did, but we're back on time again. It evidently passes more slowly for me. I have trouble remembering from ten years to ten years."

"You keep a diary."

"Of course, but I never read it. What's dead is dead. So in the end your gift failed."

"You didn't accept it, but it was always waiting."

Curiously I added, "Have you

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ever offered this to others?"

He smiled broadly. "How do you imagine so many movie stars stay so suspiciously young till the end?"

"But again, to beat an old bone, what do you gain?"

"Are we to have that prejudice again? Are you still afraid for your soul?"

"Have I one?"

"That's not for me to say." He moved the blanket over my feet. "Where's Lilly?"

"Baby-sitting with a great-grandchild."

"And so you have your wish—the grand old man of American politics. You look the part too."

I ran my hand self-consciously through my mane of silver hair. "Now who's mocking?"

"So your memory is clear."

"As clear as a bell."

He stood up, slim and young in a new Continental cut, black suit, the pants skin tight, the three button jacket fitting like a glove, and he straightened his black hat, then patted his stomach below the belt. "That tail still gives me a pot."

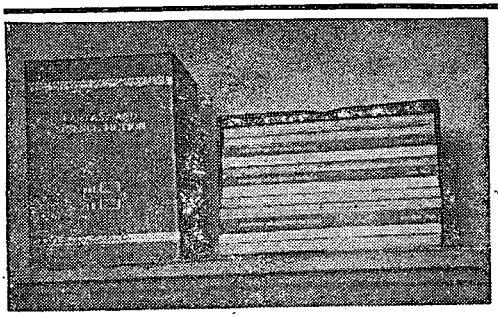
I chuckled softly. "If the pants were a bit looser you could run it down one leg."

He pursed his lips. "I stay in style, but who knows . . . it's a thought for another age." He put his hand on my arm. "I must go, I have so much work to do."

"I wonder about that work," I said gently.

He smiled, so sad and knowing a smile, and again I looked into his black eyes and beyond to—what? Nothing?

"Goodbye" I said softly, and I knew it was goodbye.



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THE ROCKS OF DAMOCLES

by Isaac Asimov

IN SOME WAYS, SCIENCE FICTION writers aren't doing too well these days. About three years ago, Mariner II seemed to settle the question of the surface temperature of Venus, placing it far above the boiling point of water.

With that, there vanished some of the most beautiful settings for s.f. stories. Old-timers may remember with nostalgia, as I do, the moist, swampy world of Weinbaum's "Parasite Planet." Well, it's gone! For that matter, I wrote a short novel under a pseudonym, only ten years ago, that was set on a Venus that was one huge ocean, with Earth-cities built underwater in the shallower regions. —All gone!

Now along comes Mariner IV and discovers craters (but no canals) on Mars.

No one expected that! I don't know of a single science fiction story that had ever placed craters on Mars. —Canals, yes, but craters, no! I have written several stories set on Mars and I have always mentioned the canals (I placed no water in them; I knew enough for that) but I've never had craters.

And yet, going by the photographs sent back by Mariner IV, the Martian surface is some four times as rich in craters as the Moon is.

Fortunately for science-fictional self-respect, astronomers themselves didn't do much better. Not one of them, as far as I know, suggested Venus might be as hot as Mercury until after the first microwave observations came to be analyzed in detail. And very few even speculated on the possibility of a cratered Mars.

In the first flush of the Martian pictures, the newspapers announced that this meant there was no life on Mars. To be sure, the pictures didn't give us life enthusiasts anything to cheer about but, as it turns out, things aren't all that bad.

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The mere fact that the pictures show no signs of life means nothing in itself, of course. Some of our own weather satellites have taken numerous pictures of the Earth under conditions comparable to those of Mariner IV and Mars and the Earth-pictures show no signs of life on our planet, either. I don't mean no signs of man; I mean no signs of any life at all. And, mind you, we know where to look for signs of life on Earth, and what to look for.

A more subtle argument for the anti-life view rests upon the mere existence of all those craters on Mars. If Mars had ever had an ample ocean and atmosphere those craters would have been eroded away. Since the craters are there, goes the argument, Mars has always been desiccated and almost airless and, therefore, the chances of life having developed in the first place are extremely small.

Quickly, however, the pro-life forces shot back. Since Mars is much closer to the asteroid zone than the Moon is, and since the asteroids are very likely to be the source of the large bodies that collide with planets and form sizable craters, Mars ought to have something like 25 times as many craters per unit surface area as the Moon does. It appears to have only four times as many; only 1/6 the expected number. What happened to the other five-sixths?

Eroded away!

If so, then the craters we do see represent the youngest sixth, the ones that have had no time to erode away yet. Assuming that the process of erosion proceeds at uniform speed, then the marks we see only tell us about the last sixth of Martian history—say six to seven hundred million years.

What happened before that we still can't tell. Water may have been present in larger quantities before then and life might have started on a comparatively water-rich and water-comfortable Mars. If so, Martian life may have been hardy enough to survive even now on the gradually bleaching bones of the planet.

Maybe not, but we can't tell from only the pictures we have. We will need much more detailed photographs or, better yet, a manned expedition to Mars.

Still, craters on Mars do set one thinking. In the course of the history of the Solar system (its inner regions, at least) the major worlds must have undergone a continuous peppering bombardment from smaller bodies. The Moon and Mars bear the visible scars of this and it is quite out of the question to suppose that the Earth could possibly have escaped its share of the bombardment.

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Although the Earth is as far from the asteroid zone as the Moon is, it is 80 times as massive as the Moon and, at equivalent distances, pulls with 80 times the force. Furthermore, Earth is the larger target, with 14 times the cross-sectional area of the Moon, so it should have endured many times as many collisions. In fact, although Earth is much farther from the asteroid zone than Mars is, it has 3.5 times the cross-sectional area and 10 times the mass of Mars, and I suspect it has suffered more of a peppering than Mars has.

The Moon is supposed to have 300,000 craters with diameters of 1 kilometer or more. Even allowing for the fact that the Earth is 70 percent ocean which can absorb collisions without being marked up as a result, the remaining 30 percent—Earth's land surface—might well have suffered at least a million collisions in its billions of years of history.

Where are they all? Erased! The effect of wind, water, and living things quickly wipes them out and every last trace of more than 99 percent of the craters formed on Earth must have vanished by now.

But surely there are remnants of the more recent ones. All one need do is look for depressions in the Earth that are more or less circular. These are easy to find, as a matter of fact, especially since they need only be roughly circular. After all, unevennesses can be put down to the effects of erosion, slippage, or further bombardment.

A nice near-circular depression might fill with water and form a near-circular sea. The Aral Sea is an example. Then, too, the northern boundary of the Black Sea forms a near-circular arc. The Gulf of Mexico can almost be made to fit a semi-circle. For that matter the Indian Ocean, and even the Pacific Ocean, have coast lines that can be made to fit circles with surprising closeness.

Whether you find such circles or not depends on how eagerly you want to find them and how ready you are to dismiss departure from strict circularity.

One of those most anxious to find possible craters is Dr. Frank Dachille of Pennsylvania State University. At least, the University has just sent me a discussion of his views which includes a map on which no less than 42 "probable and putative" meteorite craters or groups of craters are listed in the United States and near vicinity alone.

Of these, the largest in the United States proper is what is marked down as the "Michigan Basin." This is the near circle formed by Lakes Michigan and Huron, a circle some 300 miles in diameter. According to Dachille's estimate a crater this large would have to be caused by a meteorite 30 or 40 miles in diameter.

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On the map a still larger crater is indicated as "Kelly Crater," and this marks out the Atlantic coastline of the United States along the continental shelf. This forms an arc of about one-third of a circle which would be over 1200 miles in diameter if it were complete. I suppose that would require a meteorite a hundred miles in diameter or so—in other words, one of the larger asteroids.

One might dismiss such catastrophic events as having been confined to a highly specialized period of planetary history. At the very beginning of the formation of the Solar system, planetesimals were gathering together to form the planets and the last few really large ones could have left the huge scars that mark the oceans on the Earth and the maria on the Moon.

Or else there was a period in planetary history during which a possible planet between Mars and Jupiter exploded (or underwent a series of explosions) leaving the asteroid belt behind and riddling the Solar system from Mercury to Jupiter with flying shrapnel in bits up to a hundred miles across.

In either case, one might argue, this specialized period is over, the damage is done, the craters are formed, and we can dismiss the matter. There are no more planet-busters, no more asteroids of 100 miles in diameter or more floating around within reaching distance of the Earth.

Indeed, that is so. There is no body that even approaches within 25,000,000 miles of the Earth that is over, let us say, 25 miles in diameter, except for the Moon itself, and there is no reason to expect the Moon to leave its orbit. Are we safe, then?

No, we are not! Space is loaded with dust particles and pebbles that burst into our atmospheres, glow and vaporize harmlessly. In addition, however, larger chunks—not large enough to gouge out an ocean, perhaps, but large enough to do horrendous damage—are moving near us.

After all, we can find craters that are indubitably craters and that are in such good condition that they must be quite new. The most spectacular of these craters is located near Winslow, Arizona. It looks just like a small lunar crater; it is roughly circular, with an average diameter of about 4,150 feet or ⅘ of a mile. It is 570 feet deep and the bottom is filled with a layer of mashed and broken debris about 600 feet thick. It is surrounded by a wall which is from 130 to 160 feet higher than the surrounding plain.

The first to demonstrate that the crater was caused by a meteorite (and was not an extinct volcano) was the American mining engineer,

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Daniel Moreau Barringer, and the site is therefore called the Barringer Crater. Because of its origin it also bears the more dramatic name Meteor Crater. I have even seen it called the Great Barringer Meteor Crater, a name which honors, at one stroke, the size, the man and the origin.

The fact that the strike took place in an arid region, where the effects of water and living things are minimal, has kept the Barringer Crater in better preservation than would have been the case if it were located in most places on Earth. Even so, its condition is such that it is not likely to be more than 50,000 years old and, geologically speaking, that is yesterday.

If the meteorite that formed it (some millions of tons in mass) had struck now, and in the proper spot, it could wipe out the largest city on Earth, and more or less destroy vast tracks of its suburbs.

Other strikes (not as large to be sure) have taken place even in historic times, two respectable ones in the 20th Century. One took place in northern Siberia in 1908. It involved a meteor of only a few dozen tons of mass, perhaps, but that was enough to gouge out craters up to 150 feet in diameter and to knock down trees for twenty to thirty miles around.

That will do, and how! A fall like that in the middle of Manhattan would probably knock down every building on the island and large numbers across the rivers on either side, killing several million people within minutes of impact.

In fact, that 1908 fall did come close to wiping out a major city. It has been calculated that if the meteor had moved in an orbit parallel to its actual path, but had been displaced just enough in space to allow the Earth to rotate for five more hours before impact, it would have hit St. Petersburg (then the capital of the Russian Empire and now Leningrad) right on the nose.

Then, in 1947, there was another such fall, but a smaller one, in far-eastern Siberia.

Two falls, then, both in Siberia, and both doing virtually no damage except to trees and wild animals. Mankind has clearly had an unusual run of luck.

There are some astronomers who estimate that there may be two such "city-busters" hitting Earth per century. If so, we can make some calculations. The area of New York City is about 1/670,000 of the Earth's surface. If we assume that a city-buster can strike any place on Earth, at random, then a given city-buster has 1 chance in 670,000 of hitting New York.

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If it comes, on the average, once every fifty years, then its chances of hitting New York in any one particular year is 1 in 670,000 times 50, or 1 in 33,000,000.

But New York City is only one city out of many. If we consider that the total densely-urbanized area on Earth is 330 times the area of New York City (my spur-of-the-moment estimate) then the chance of some urban center being flattened by a city-buster in any given year is 1 in 100,000.

To put it another way, it's even money that some time within the next 100,000 years, some good-sized city somewhere on Earth will be wiped out by a city-buster. And that is probably an over-optimistic prediction since the urbanized area on Earth is increasing and may continue to increase for quite a while, presenting a much better target.

This makes it clear, too, why no urbanized area in the past has been destroyed. Cities have only existed for say 7,000 years and until the last couple of centuries, the really large ones have been few and widely scattered. The chances for a major disaster of this sort having taken place at any time in recorded history is probably not better than 1 in 100—and it hasn't happened.

But must we have a direct hit? What about the dangers of a near-miss. On land, a near-miss may be tolerable. Even a 1908-type meteorite striking land fifty miles from a populated center may leave that center intact. But what if the meteorite strikes the ocean? Three out of four, after all, ought to.

If the meteorite is not inordinately large and if it strikes far enough away from a coast-line, the damage may be small. But there is always a chance that a large meteorite may strike near a coast-line, even perhaps in a land-locked arm of the sea. It might then do severe damage, and since the appropriate regions of the sea are much larger in area than are the cities of the world, the chances of a catastrophic oceanic near-miss are correspondingly greater than the chances of a dead-center hit on a city.

The oceanic near-miss might be expected, on the average, not once in a hundred thousand years, but once in ten thousand years or even less. In short, there should be some record of such disasters in historical times, and I think that perhaps there are.

Noah's Flood *did* happen. Or, put it this way— There was a vast and disastrous flood in the Tigris-Euphrates some six thousand years ago. Concerning this, Babylonian stories were handed down which, with the generations, were interlarded with mythological detail. The tale of Noah's Flood as given in the Bible is a version of those stories.

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Nor is this speculation. Archaeological probings on the sites of some of the ancient cities of Babylonia have come across thick layers of sediment within which there are no human remains or artifacts.

What laid down these sediments? The usual suggestion is that since the Tigris-Euphrates-complex floods occasionally, it may have flooded particularly disastrously on one occasion. This has always seemed insufficient to me. I don't see how any river flood can possibly lay down all the observed sediment or do the kind of damage dramatized later in the tales of universal flood, death and destruction—even allowing for the natural exaggeration of story-tellers.

I have an alternative suggestion which, as far as I know, is original with me. I have seen nothing about it anywhere.

What if a city-buster meteorite had, some six thousand years ago, landed in the Persian Gulf. The Persian Gulf is nearly landlocked and such an impact might well have heaved up a wall of water that would move northwestward and would burst in, with absolutely devastating impact, upon the low plain of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

It would be a super-tsunami, a tidal wave to end all tidal waves, and it would scour much of the valley clean. The water would cover what was indeed "all the world" to the inhabitants and drown countless numbers in its path.

In support of this notion, I would like to point out that the Bible speaks of more than rain. Genesis 7:11 says not only that "the windows of heaven were opened" meaning that it rained, but also that "the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up." Meaning what? Meaning, it seems to me, that the water came in from the sea.

Furthermore, Noah's ark lacked any motive power, either sails or oars and simply drifted. Where did it drift? It came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (the ancient Urartu), in the Caucasian foot-hills northwest of the Tigris-Euphrates. But an ordinary river flood would have washed boats southeastward out to sea. Only a tidal wave of unprecedented scope would have carried the ark northwestward.

Nor need Noah's Flood be the only tale of a remembered oceanic near-miss. Many peoples (but not all) have flood-legends, and it may have been such a flood-legend that gave rise to the dim tales that Plato finally dramatized in his story of Atlantis. Such catastrophies may indeed have happened more than once in the memory of man.

When will the next disaster come? A hundred thousand years hence? A thousand years? Tomorrow? There's no way of telling.

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Of course, we might scan near space and see what's floating around there.

Till 1898, the answer was: Nothing! Between the orbits of Mars and Venus was nothing of any consequence save the Earth and Moon, for all anyone could tell. Nothing worse than pebbles and small boulders, at any rate, that could produce the effect of a shooting-star and occasionally reach Earth's surface. A meteorite might conceivably kill a man or demolish a house, but the damage to be expected of meteorites was only the tiniest fraction of that done by lightning bolts, for instance, and man has managed to live with the thunderstorm.

Then in 1898, the German astronomer, Gustav Witt, discovered Asteroid 433. Nothing unusual, until Witt calculated its orbit. This was elliptical, of course, and in that part of the elliptical path that was farthest from the Sun, the asteroid travelled between Mars and Jupiter as did all asteroids till then discovered.

In the remainder of its orbit, however, it travelled between the orbits of Mars and Earth. Its orbit approached within 14,000,000 miles of that of Earth and at set intervals, when both objects were at just the right place in their respective orbits, that approach would be realized and the asteroid would be at only half the distance from us that Venus is. Witt named the asteroid Eros after the son of Mars and Venus in the classical myths. That began the practice of masculine names for all asteroids with unusual orbits.

Eros' close approach was a matter of self-congratulations among scientists. It could be used to determine the dimensions of the Solar system with unprecedented accuracy, when close. And this was done in 1931, when it approached within 17,000,000 miles. From the periodic flickering of its light, it was decided that Eros was not a sphere but an irregular, roughly brick-shaped object which brightened when we saw it long-ways and dimmed when we saw it end-ways. Its longest diameter is estimated to be 15 miles and its shortest 5 miles.

There was no particular nervousness felt about Eros' close approach. After all, 14,000,000 miles isn't exactly *close*, you know.

As time went on, however, several additional objects were discovered with orbits that came closer to Earth's than that of Venus does, and such objects came to be called "Earth-grazers." Several of them passed closer to the Sun than Venus does and one of them, Icarus, actually moves in closer to the Sun than Mercury does.

The climax came in 1937, when the asteroid, Hermes, was discovered by an astronomer named Reinmuth. On October 30, it passed within 487,000 miles of the Earth and the calculation of its orbit

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seems to show that it might possibly come within 200,000 miles—closer than the Moon! (For information on some Earth-grazers, see Table 1.)

Table 1
The Earth-Grazers

Name	*Year of Discovery*	*Length of Orbital Period (years)*	*Estimated Maximum Diameter (miles)*	*Estimated Mass (trillions of tons)*	*Closest Approach to Earth (millions of miles)*
Albert	1911	c. 4	3	300	20
Eros	1898	1.76	15	15,000	14
Amor	1932	2.67	10	12,000	10
Apollo	1932	1.81	2	100	7
Icarus	1949	1.12	1	12	4
Adonis	1936	2.76	1	12	1.5
Hermes	1937	1.47	1	12	0.2

Even so, why worry? A miss of 200,000 miles is still a fair-sized miss, isn't it?

No, it isn't, and for three reasons. In the first place, the orbits of asteroids aren't necessarily fixed. The Earth-grazers have small masses, astronomically speaking, and a close approach to a larger world can introduce changes in that orbit. Comets, for instance, which have asteroidal masses, have been observed on more than one occasion to undergo radical orbital changes as a result of close approaches to Jupiter. Hermes doesn't approach Jupiter at all closely to be sure, but it does skim the Earth-Moon system, and, on occasion, Mercury, and it is subject to orbital change for that reason.

As a matter of fact, Hermes hasn't been located since its first sighting in 1937, though it should have come fairly close every three years or so. This may well mean that its orbit has already changed somewhat so that we don't know the right place to look for it and will rediscover it, if at all, only by accident.

A random change in Hermes' orbit is much more likely to move it away from Earth than toward it, since there is much more room away than toward. Still, there is a finite chance that such a change might cause it to zero in, and a direct collision of Hermes and Earth is horrifying to think of. The Earth won't be perceptibly damaged, but we could be. If you think that a meteorite a few million tons in mass could gouge out a hole nearly a mile across, you can see that Hermes,

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with a few trillions of tons of mass, could excavate a good-sized portion of an American state or a European nation.

Secondly, these Earth-grazers probably haven't been in their orbit through all the history of the Solar system. Some collision, some perturbation, has shifted their orbits—originally within the asteroid belt—and caused them to fall in toward the Sun. On occasion, then, new ones might join them. Naturally, it is the smaller asteroids that stand the best chance of serious orbital changes but there are thousands of Hermes-sized asteroids in the asteroid belt and Earth can still witness the coming of unwelcome new strangers.

Thirdly, the only Earth-grazers we can detect are those big enough to see at hundreds of thousands of miles. There are bound to be smaller ones in greater profusion. If there are half a dozen objects a mile in diameter and more that come wandering into near-space on occasion, there may be half a thousand or more which are 100 feet in diameter or so, and which could still do tremendous damage if they wandered in too closely.

No, I see no way, at present, of either predicting or avoiding the occurrence of a very occasional major catastrophe. We spin through space with the possibility of collision with these Rocks of Damocles ever-present.

In the future, perhaps, things may be diffreent. The men in the space-stations that will eventually be set up about the Earth may find themselves, among other things, on the watch for the Earth-grazers, something like the iceberg watch conducted in northern waters since the sinking of the Titanic (but much more difficult of course).

The rocks, boulders and mountains of space may be painstakingly tagged and numbered. Their changing orbits may be kept under steady watch. Then, a hundred years from now, perhaps, or a thousand, some computer on such a station will sound the alarm: "Collision orbit!"

Then a counterattack, kept in waiting for all that time would be set in motion. The dangerous rock would be met with an H-bomb (or, by that time, something more appropriate) designed to trigger off on collision. The rock would glow and vaporize and change from a boulder to a conglomeration of pebbles.

Even if they continued on course, the threat would be lifted. Earth would merely be treated to a spectacular (and harmless) shower of shooting-stars.

Until then, however, the Rocks of Damocles remain suspended, and eternity for millions of us may, at any time, be an hour away.

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Kathleen James is a pseudonym for a young woman who was "born in Scotland, brought up in England, graduate of Sheffield University, married to a schoolmaster, no children but one Siamese cat. Currently lecturing in literature at a Teachers Training College." Her first story for F&SF concerns a young dishwasher's tragic affair with an assassin. In that naked synopsis, an unlikely theme, but under Miss James' alternately powerful and gentle direction, a moving and effective story.

THE BLIND GOD'S EYE

by Kathleen James

IF I'D HAVE LISTENED TO MY mother in the first place I might have spared myself some trouble. But you can't really teach anybody anything; you've got to find out yourself. Now my fault is thinking that what people say must be true. So I believed Grane because it seemed he must know his mind better than my mother did, and when it turned out she was right and I was wrong I didn't see anything to do but leave home. Maybe that was a mistake too, but I always did learn slowly. But anyway I did it, and I went to the Salvation Army and washed dishes, and they found a home for the baby.

And now you understand just what I am. But of course you're wrong. I'm not attractive enough for a pro—I don't mean I'm ugly, I mean not attractive, as in magnets—and for a year after Grane went I used to look at the zips of men's pants in public places and repeat to myself, "Horses aren't disgusting. Dogs aren't disgusting. So it can't be them, it's got to be you."

That's why it was that when I got a job at the White Hart it was in the back place and not on the bar. I don't enjoy washing dishes; you begin to recognise them as they come round and the soda gets your hands. But when you get a

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whole pile of trays all full and stacked on top of each other like a glass bridecake you feel kind of pleased with yourself. Until they take the layers away and they start coming round again dirty, that is. That only works when the place isn't too crowded, of course. Late evenings and weekends when the boys are in and the potmen are yelling for glasses faster than you can wash them and the water's all greasy brown with ash and lees and bobbing with dead matches and soaked butts and you haven't time to empty it and all the towels are wet at once, the place is pure hell.

Mostly on those nights I'd have my head so much in the sink that I'd see nothing until the left-hand board began to get full, and I'd look for a place to put a glass and not find one, and suddenly wake up to find I was washing and drying like a maniac with the place shut up and the last singers going home, and all around me a barricade of clean crockery like the inside of a glass factory. But occasionally when it was quieter I'd have time to do a full tray before the men yelled for it, and then I'd carry it to the hatch myself and look through. It was one of those times I saw the redhead.

There was a Veronist rally going on outside at the time and you couldn't hear yourself think for the noise. That was why the bar was quiet; most of the boys had gone outside to listen, and some of them to jeer and throw bottles. The speaker's voice was booming out over the amplifiers at just that irritating level where you couldn't quite hear what he was saying, but there was a constant kind of crackle of heckling and quite a lot of organised boos, and every so often a big roar of cheering from his supporters. Now and then you would hear one voice stick out above the others yelling an insult or a slogan, and then a lot of confused noise when other people shouted him down. It wasn't quite a riot but it sounded as if it was building up to one, and I was hoping that the cops were going to come soon before we got our windows smashed again.

The redhead was sitting by himself in one of the corners opposite the bar, and I noticed him first because he was the only person there who didn't seem to be listening to the racket at all. He was a big roughneck in a dirty shirt—something from the fringes of the yards; an out of work spacer, maybe—and there were half a dozen empty glasses laid out in two rows on the table in front of him. He had a full one in his hand, which he was looking at very carefully as if it was the only important thing in the world, and then quite suddenly in one gulp he tilted the whole lot down his throat, wiped his mouth, and put the glass neatly at the end of one of his rows. At the same mo-

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ment he reached out his other hand to the bell to call for another. Then he must have seen me looking at him because he looked straight back across at me. It was one of those cattleyard looks that you get from a certain kind of man, a sort of cool summing-up of points as if he's deciding not to buy you, and it made me blush and pull my head in quickly.

Martin the potboy came in with a tray of empties as I got back to the sink.

"See that red-haired customer in the corner?" he said, tipping them all into the water (which is how it gets full of cigarette-ends in the first place). "He's a queer one. I've been watching him for over an hour and he does the same thing every time. Spends five or ten minutes just looking at it, sinks the lot at one swallow, and lines up the glasses like a sergeant-major. And if you'll believe me, he's sober. I'll tell you something else, too: he's drunk seven in a row, and I'm still waiting to see him leave the room."

"Probably he goes while you're out here."

He shook his head. "I'll take my oath he's not moved all night."

Just then there was the sound of breaking glass from out front as the first bottle came through, and the crowd noises surged up like late dinner at the zoo. Martin hared off in one direction to bolt the door and I rushed in the other to call the riot squad, and by the time things cooled off around midnight with the vans leaving and the last brass helmets coiling up their fire-hoses, our odd customer had gone.

There are some women who can't live without men. I don't mean sex, that's kind of different, but without men. So long as there's some kind of male around they can go on nagging his head off quite happily, but as soon as they don't have one they can't settle to anything. I'm like that, in spite of the unmagnetism and the zips and everything. I've got to be in love with someone. And if there isn't anybody handy, well, I just fall for the nearest stranger and worship him from a distance till it just about kills me. Not even Grane cured me of that, and I was about ready for another go.

I got back late after the riot and went straight to bed, and I had a queer dream. I dreamed that I was back in the hospital among the shiny paint and the rows of beds, and the nurse was coming down the ward carrying a wrapped-up bundle.

"It's your little boy," she said to me, "and you've got to feed him."

"No," I said. "It's not mine, I won't have it. It isn't my baby at all, take it away."

But she thrust the bundle into my arms and began to unwrap it, and the child clung to my breast like a leech, crying piteously, and

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the more I tried to push it away the tighter it clung. It seemed to be wrapped in yards and yards of blanket which the nurse kept unwinding until we were surrounded by heaps of white stuff like the layers of a chrysalis; and when at last she came to the end and twitched the last fold away, it wasn't a baby at all but a plastic doll, the kind you practice on at the pre-natal clinic, and it had red hair.

I woke up at that point shaking, and I remembered an old wives' tale from when I was a little girl: to dream about a baby means disaster.

There were plenty of disasters about that year. The assassination of the President was the biggest one maybe, but we had our share of plagues, floods and earthquakes too. I suppose the Veronists counted as one of the first; plagues, I mean. Some people said they planted the bomb that blew President Anu's official car half over the capital along with his host's wife, two aides, his Secretary of State for Peace and about a hundred citizens in cotton dresses who were waving flags; but then it didn't really seem as if they could have, because it was them who shouted loudest about the inefficiency of the police in not getting the assassin caught, and when John Reputa was arrested on suspicion, it was a Veronist agitator who stirred up the crowd that lynched him before he could be tried. They soaked him in petrol and lit it with a blow-lamp, and some of the petrol ran over the road to where the cans were piled and exploded and two blocks of flats burned down and a warehouse and seventy-three more people got killed. After that, though, there seemed to be a lot more Veronists about than there were before, and they held rallies all over the place and being on a main square we got our front windows broken twice.

People even began to say that Hugh Veron would be the next President, but that was hard to believe. You only had to look at him not to like him. Of course he was a very good speaker, and when he started on that stuff about the Jewel of the Solar System and the human heritage and the tears began to run down his face and he paused for breath that way and hung on to the microphone it was hard not to join in and cheer, but I never thought the Colonists were that bad. I mean, they all came from Earth in the first place like us, and it stands to reason they can't all have been Rooski warmongers and even if they were it was generations ago and not their fault. But like I said there seemed to be more Veronists than ever and some of them began to wear white blouses and stick out their elbows on the streets.

Well, the next day I went in early on account of the clearing up. Ray and Martin had boarded up the windows and Mr. Grey was

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on the telephone having an argument with a glazier and Vera was leaning on the bar as usual making the place look decorative. I knew that if Mrs. Grey came down and all that glass still lying on the floor she'd soon shift her, but in the meantime she had on one of her haughty looks meaning that all that stuff was "the girl's" job. That was me. So I got a broom and dustpan out of the back place and started.

There was only one customer in so early with the bar hardly open, and I didn't see him for a minute or two. It was kind of dim inside with the boarded windows and only the plastic roses in the ceiling, and the sun came splashing in at the doorway bright enough to blind you and I was hooking under the benches with my broom after splinters. When I did see him it gave me a kind of queer feeling, for that dream was still in my head and I couldn't get rid of it. And naturally it was the big redhaired roughneck in the dirty shirt.

It must have been early for him too, because there was only one empty glass on the table in front of him and he was still holding the second in his hand. He sat absolutely quiet, just like a statue, and at first I thought he didn't know I was there. I nearly bumped right into him with my broom and he didn't move, and when I said sorry he turned just his eyes in my direction once and went back to staring at his drink. I swept all round his feet and under the bench and he didn't move them or look at me at all. That wasn't like our customers; they're a friendly lot mostly, especially the regulars, always ready with a joke. A bit too ready, some of them, but they're not exactly like statues.

I carried the broken glass out and came back to polish the tables. There was a bit more air of bustle about the place this time; both the men had vanished into the cellar and even Vera was languidly dusting the little ornaments at the back of the bar, and I saw that Mrs. Grey had come in with her green silk working apron on over her morning frock. The morning frock was black with long sleeves and her evening one was gold with a low neck, but she only wore the green apron with the black one. They were both very tight, but she worked a lot faster than Vera for all that.

The redhead had finished his second drink by now and seemed to have come back to earth.

"Got any food, miss?" he asked Vera.

That was a mistake. He wasn't clean or slick enough for her, so naturally she didn't hear him.

"Bacon and egg, dear? Pie, sandwiches?" Mrs. Grey had the whole thing organised while she was still folding her duster. "Got some nice bacon fresh up from the country."

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"Yeah, sure." He sounded as if he didn't care; she could have been asking if he preferred earth or gravel. Not that she minded. She was used to all kinds. She bustled into the kitchen, leaving Vera to cope.

"And—uh—another beer, miss."

Vera pulled it as if she had a personal grudge against the machinery and thunked the glass on the counter. "Here, Alice, you take it. I'm busy." And she went on dusting china Bambis as if her life depended on it.

I knew that she was mostly mad with Mother Grey and because she'd been as good as told off in front of a customer for being too slow, but the redhead didn't and I thought maybe she'd hurt his feelings, so I smiled at him extra nicely to make up for it when I carried the glass across. It didn't do much good, though, because all he did was give me another of his cattle-yard looks, and then I wished I hadn't bothered. Then he switched me off and went back to looking into his drink, and I just dropped out of the universe. I was dead furious for a bit and banged all the crockery, but then I decided he was probably just thinking about something. And anyway he had nice eyes: sort of green and shiny.

The place began to warm up after that as more of the regulars came in, and with washing dishes and helping Mrs. Grey in the kitchen I didn't see much of the action in the bar. Everybody was talking about the riot last night, and there was word of a big Veronist meeting before long—the biggest yet, people said—and somebody mentioned a rumour that some really important person was going to be the speaker. Somebody else suggested it might even be Hugh Veron himself. I was a bit interested in that, because I'd never seen Hugh Veron except on telly, but everybody knew that it was silly because Hugh Veron only went to big important places and he was touring somewhere in Asia and anyway you couldn't get anywhere near him because of his bodyguard. And even if he came and talked off the public bar in the front place I wouldn't see him because I'd have my nose over the sink in the back washing dishes. But it sounded a bit interesting and as if something might happen.

Some men came with a truck full of ladders around lunch-time and began posting up big stickers on the billboard across the street. I had a look to see if they were anything new—I like those big coloured cartoon-y advertisements because they're funny—but these were all to do with the Presidential election and asking you to vote for various people. I'm old enough to vote; I could have voted for President Anu last time, and probably I would've, because I liked him and everybody said he was good.

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But I didn't bother in the end because you could see he was going to win, and anyway I'd never voted before and you have to go in by yourself and I was afraid of doing the wrong thing.

I didn't suppose I'd vote this time either. People said Mr. Marchbanks was the right one to have, but I didn't know anything about him and with a name like that he sounded a bit sissy. He was one of the ones on the posters and he looked all right, an ordinary nice kind of face with a long nose and spectacles, but I didn't know. Mr. Grey was dead keen on politics and most likely he'd give us all time off to go. I reckoned I'd probably do some shopping in mine. I didn't get much time off often when the shops were open.

Hugh Veron wasn't mentioned on any of the posters, and that was a bit funny because everybody was talking about him. The other man who appeared oftenest was called Mr. Albertini and he had another nice ordinary face, just a bit darker and no rims to his spectacles. As far as I could see it didn't matter which of them you chose, they both seemed to be saying the same things, more money for widows and orphans, Martian treaty, all that. And whichever it was they weren't going to bring Grane back, and me and my baby were as good as widows and orphans but nobody had ever mentioned giving me any money.

There wasn't a riot that night, but there was the usual weekend crowd. I started out tired, and by the time all the clean glasses were stacked and the last lights turned out in the big room the back of my neck and my legs were one ache and my heelbones were numb. I rubbed my fingers with Velogel, the cream that gives you skin like velvet, but I guess the makers never had to contend with washing soda. I'd been using it six months and anybody who sold velvet with that texture would be facing prosecution.

"One o'clock, Alice," Mrs. Grey said. "And don't be late, now, we're going to be busy again. I declare, this town's filling up with strangers; I've never seen so many fresh faces. It must be the new yard they're opening down on the river. Though I must say they're not such a nice type of person as most of our regulars. One or two of them I didn't care for at all; they had quite an ugly look."

Of course she didn't mean their faces; one or two of our regulars would scare the canary, if you had one. But I heard some voices among the usual barroom rumble that had a kind of a nasty ring.

"Well, I hope they've all gone home," I said. "I've got to walk back by myself."

"That's right, dearie, you be careful. Keep to the main roads is what I say, and if anybody stops you scream for a policeman."

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"Oh, Alice knows what to do, don't you, dear?" That was Vera, the cat. It was all right for her; she lived four blocks away and there was a big slimy-looking crewhead off a spacetrooper waiting out back for her tonight, and the length of time it would take them to walk those four blocks you wouldn't believe. I said goodnight to Mr. and Mrs. Grey and pretended I hadn't heard Vera, and I grabbed hold of my courage and started.

There were plenty of lights round the square, but it looked dark the way all places do at night when there's nobody about. It's worse in a way when there's nobody there at all; if there are even two or three other people you kind of feel safe because if one gets rough you can always yell to the others for help, but when there's nobody every sort of shuffle is frightening and you never know what's round the next corner. A big monotrain came whistling past me once with all its coaches lighted and you could see one or two passengers sitting up there at the windows, and it made a kind of company for a second. But after it had gone and the last hum died out of the track the street seemed darker and lonelier than ever and I could feel the blood banging away in my throat as if it meant to come through.

It's funny, too. When I was a kid and too young to know better—before I met Grane—I used to walk the streets every hour of the night coming home from things, and never think anything except to look at the stars and the lights and tell myself crazy stories where I always ended up as Princess. And nothing ever happened to me at all. I guess it doesn't until you begin to know that it can. Because that night I was clean scared out of my panties, and sure enough as I came round the last corner into our street, where I could nearly see the laurel bush by the front steps towards the end of the road, and just as I was beginning to let myself run a little because I was so close to being behind that door, a shadow kind of moved up on me out of a vacant lot and turned itself into a man with a white blouse and a twisty kind of smile, and he took hold of my arm.

"Nice night, missy. What are you running for so fast? Just come over here a minute dear, I've something to show you."

I didn't need showing; I could see what he was doing with his other hand, and I have a fair notion of what men keep inside their flies. I jerked my arm as hard as I could and tried to kick at his ankles, but it takes you a few seconds to get desperate, and until you do you have a kind of built-in dislike of hurting people, so before I'd got around to really kicking him he had hold of both my arms and was kind of slobbering over my jaw and my nose and we were wres-

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tling around over the pavement and I couldn't get at him properly. People ask why girls don't scream, and men leer and suggest it's because they like it. Well, I hadn't any breath left for breathing with that wet mouth plastered over my nostrils, and anyway all the people in my neighbourhood live at the back and go to bed early. There wasn't a single light in any house in the whole of that street.

And all the time we were wrestling, someone else was standing at the back of my head watching and thinking, "This isn't me." Just as it did when Grane went, and over the baby and everything. But of course it was. Just as it was then.

I never did scream in the end—he did. I never even saw it coming. Just suddenly I got a big breath and there was the cold air on my face where it was wet, and then there was a horrible kind of cracking sound like the butcher makes and he sort of peeled off me and doubled up and screamed. It was about the worst noise I ever heard. That scream somehow scared me more than all the wrestling, and I just dropped everything and ran. I didn't get a proper look at the other man, only his hair under the streetlamp. Maybe I ought to have stayed around to help, but I wasn't thinking anything at all. I ran like an animal and I didn't stop running until I was up those steps and in the door and up all three flights and in my own room, and then I doubled up with the cramps in my belly and the blood running down my thighs and I just crouched on the floor and shook for ten minutes before I could even reach the towels out of the wardrobe. And of course it was all pure fright because he hadn't had time to touch me; though I had a swollen lip and some fine bruises on my arms the day after.

And just to add to what I said before, if you think anything happened in our house after all the running and door-slamming I made in the middle of the night, you thought wrong. My neighbours sleep like the dead. It's only when you creak up the stairs with your shoes in your hand that they waken and complain about the noise.

I stayed in the next morning instead of going shopping as I'd intended, and towards one o'clock I had a thought about not going to work. I had a horrible kind of feeling against getting mixed up with people again even in a crowd; I didn't like the idea of going out on the stairs or leaving the front door. But if I didn't go I'd have to phone the White Hart—Mr. Grey doesn't mind you being sick but he gets awfully mad if you don't let him know—and to do that I'd have to go to the box at the end of the street, and if I did that I might as well go to work. So finally I went, but I walked past that vacant lot

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very quickly. Not that there was anything to see there.

They were in the middle of the lunchtime rush when I arrived and the dishes were piling up towards the ceiling, so I started straight in and nobody had any time to notice my bruises. It must have been nearly three when things began to clear in the back and Mother Grey sent me out front with a tray to collect the spare pots. One of the first things I saw was my redhead sitting in his usual corner. He must have been there for hours, because the table was just covered with empty glasses.

It didn't register at first that he'd been sitting there waiting for me, until I worked round there and began to clear in front of him. I had started to make up a story about the hero from space who'd followed me up a dark street on purpose to save me from the lurking villain in the blouse, and I won't say that he didn't play some part in it. And maybe I'd given some thought to what he said on our next meeting and just how he went about revealing his love, like in the reels, and I'd been worrying some while I put the plates away about whether he'd be more likely to sweep me off my feet with burning kisses or just to smile at me silently across the room with a look that everybody in the bar would recognise at once, especially Vera. But when I thought about it, the idea of burning kisses didn't seem so good really, and I'd mostly decided that probably he just took my hand in a shy kind of way and gasped out some breathless phrases about my beauty, and then we went straight out to a quiet registry office and Vera just split with jealousy.

What he actually said was, "All right. How many people have you told?"—just like that, straight out, as if we were right in the middle of a conversation instead of not even having started. It gave me a most horrible shock, because I hadn't really seen the second man properly at all, just his hair for a moment briefly and it had looked kind of dark, the way a lot of colours do under yellow light, and it might easily have been red or black or anything, and of course not even I had thought the story could possibly be true. I always have a feeling my stories are probably visible on the outside, like having a telly screen in the middle of your forehead, and then I feel guilty because I wouldn't like any of the people who act in them to get to see themselves and for a minute it seemed maybe as if he could. But of course it wasn't that really, it was just one of those things that if you're thinking something hard enough yourself you think the other person must be thinking it too and naturally they aren't. So of course he'd recognised me and thought I must have recognised him, and I hadn't. But

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anyway I went bright red and fumbled the next glass and nearly dropped the whole tray on the floor.

"N—nobody," I said.

He grabbed it just before it went over the edge and steadied it and his hand accidentally came down on top of mine, but there was nothing shy and gentle about it, he nearly crushed my fingers. His hands were dirty too like his shirt, with oil under the nails, though they were smooth for a spacer's. But then he'd likely been out of work for a bit.

"Then don't."

He was looking into my face with the same kind of expression he had when he looked into his beer, with his forehead kind of drawn together as if he was trying to see something clear through it, but when he looked at me like that it made me feel queer, almost frightened.

"Why not?"

He went on staring at me for a second or two longer, and then quite suddenly he smiled. It was like a kick under the ribs. His eyes kind of lit up from inside like sun through seawater and I could feel my knees and my wrists begin to shake. I had to hang on to that tray like crazy. "What you doing tonight, kid?" he said, and his voice had got gentle and his fingers weren't crushing mine any more but just holding. It made my ears hum.

"Well, I work till half-past eleven."

"I know a place sells steaks until one. That do?"

"All right." And I nearly split a gut trying to sound like men asked me out every night.

"And kid—what's your name?"

"Alice."

"Alice—no need to tell anybody what happened last night, huh?"

"Well—all right. But what about my lip?"

He grinned at me and touched it with his fingertip and made a kind of face. "The world's full of doors," honey."

And so when Mr. Grey noticed my face wasn't the same shape as usual and asked what happened, I didn't ask him what I ought to say to the police like I'd been going to. I made up another story instead, but this one was about my wardrobe. He was so sweet and concerned about it, and so was Mrs. Grey, that I was quite ashamed afterwards and wanted to tell them the truth after all. But I didn't.

I didn't even boast about my date in the end, though I'd meant to; but that was mostly Vera's fault. When I heard her carrying on behind the bar being so sweet and coy and dropping hints about her slimy sweetheart and batting her eyelids at the boys I thought of all the smart things she'd say and I knew she'd spoil it. So I slid off

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quietly at closing time and didn't even wait around to say goodnight. Red was waiting by one of the streetlamps in the square—that was his name, Red Middleton—and when I saw his hair under the light I knew for sure it really had been him. But he didn't say anything, just took my hand and started walking. He wasn't like Grane, he didn't squeeze palms or play with my fingers or anything, he just held my hand as if it was a hand and we walked. Too much technique can be boring, at that.

The steak place was small and plain and mostly filled with transport men and spacers, but at any rate they knew how to cook steaks. That's rare. That's a joke—anyway Red said so, and he laughed. I didn't quite get it and I still don't, only he seemed to think it was clever of me so I didn't tell him. We talked about a lot of things the way people do, and I told him about Grane and the baby and everything and about the Salvation Army and washing dishes. He looked at me for a long time after that as if I'd said something queer, but when I asked what it was he said it wasn't, and he asked, "Do you tell all your boyfriends that?"

So I said probably I would only I didn't have any, and then he looked at me some more. It didn't strike me till afterwards that we'd talked about me and hardly at all about him, and all I knew was his name and that he was a spacer and he was waiting for a ship—or at any rate I asked if that was what he was and he said, "Yes."

And when I thought of it later I was ashamed, because my mother always told me that talking about yourself is conceited and I thought he'd think I was bad-mannered, so I decided I'd be careful to ask about him next time. But he didn't seem to mind, in fact he kept asking me more until I was practically embarrassed. And if you think about it, if everybody decided not to talk about themselves but only to ask questions about the other person all the time, there'd be some pretty funny conversations.

After a while we got around to politics—I don't know how, because I'm not interested a bit—and he asked me about Hugh Veron, and if I didn't think he was a truly great man. So I told him that no I didn't, even if he did have a face like a ferret which wasn't his fault, only I didn't feel that way about those Colonists and they couldn't help being Rooskies and anyway I knew several Rooskies who used to live next door to us and were very nice people, especially their son. And then he laughed at me and his eyes got like seawater again and he said he liked me too, which seemed a funny thing to say only I was pleased that he did.

I didn't like to ask him about the man in the blouse at first, particularly after he'd said not to tell

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anyone, but when he said he liked me I thought I would. So I said, "Why were you in our street last night?"

And he grinned and said, "You're just irresistible without knowing it, honey. I was tracking you."

But of course that wasn't true—about me being irresistible, I mean—because he could have talked to me at work any time if he'd wanted to; and he must have been tracking me very quietly, because I'd been noticing everything with being frightened and I hadn't seen him or heard him at all. So I asked, "Why?"

And then he got serious and said, "I couldn't help wondering why you were so interested in me."

Then I was terribly ashamed and I could see why he'd been giving me those queer looks, and I wanted to get up and go away, but he wouldn't let me. So I told him about Martin and all those drinks and how we'd never seen him leave the room, and he said, "Hell and damnation"—but not really to me, sort of to himself as if he was angry about something he'd done. And then he laughed and said, "I've got a very peculiar constitution."

I asked him what happened to the man in the white blouse after I ran away, but he wouldn't tell me, so I knew it must have been something nasty and I didn't like to say any more. And he said if I told the police they'd only ask me a lot of questions and probably nothing would come of it in the end, and anyway I didn't need to be frightened because he'd take me home himself. And he did, and walking home in the dark with him was really nice. And anyway, what he said about the police was probably true, so I promised him I wouldn't tell.

When we got to our doorstep he took hold of my elbows as if he meant to kiss me, and then just stood there for a minute or two holding me and looking into my face with a queer kind of expression. Then quite suddenly he gave my arms a kind of squeeze, said, "Goodnight, Alice," and turned round and walked away leaving me just standing there.

I was surprised, and a bit disappointed, too, because he'd seemed very kind and loving all night and it was a long time since I'd kissed anyone, but then some men think that kind of thing is respectful. He hadn't looked like that, but you never know. And anyway, there was always tomorrow. So I creaked upstairs with my shoes in my hand and dreamed about redhaired men all night, and sure enough next morning one of my neighbours asked me what time I got in and was quite mad because I'd made a noise.

The day after was Sunday. That's one of our busy days, but it's

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different from the others because the boys bring their girls in then and we spend most of the time making toast and sandwiches and we use a lot more of the little fancy-shaped glasses that are such a nuisance to dry, and Vera is always in a bad temper because of the competition. I'd hoped I'd see Red—in fact I'd been counting on it, but he wasn't there, and he wasn't there all day. Not that I'd have time to speak to him if he had been, but I'd been looking forward to it and I was kind of disappointed. In fact I came the nearest I've ever got to having a quarrel with Vera, and Mrs. Grey was quite sharp with both of us.

They were busy putting something up in the square outside, a kind of a platform thing with steps up to it and a little fence at the front for leaning on, and Ray the potman told me it was a rostrum for the political rally on Monday. There were men with ladders messing about with cables, too, and people hanging things from the lights and a whole gang trying to put a great big black and white banner with "Purity" written on it right across the front of the hotel opposite, only it kept coming down. "Purity" is the Veronist motto, though I can't think what's so pure about them, especially after the other night.

Nobody was in a very good mood. Mr. Grey was upset because some of the regulars didn't come in at all with rubbernecking round the city at the preparations for the rally, and some of the others only dropped in for about one drink and went away again, and all the glasses got taken outside and we had to collect them off the pavement so there were more breakages than usual, and the day's takings were down. And the set that did come in along towards closing time were rowdy and one got in an argument with Martin over his change and pushed him up against the bar by the front of his jacket and made all kinds of threats and we nearly had to fetch the police in. And then of course Martin wanted to leave and Mr. Grey had an awful time getting him not to, and he stayed but he sulked all night and broke some more glasses throwing them in the sink, and I cut myself fishing out the pieces and had to go on washing all stuck with plaster that kept coming off in the water. It was a terrible day. By the time it was finished I just wanted to cry.

When I came out it was quite dark, but the men in the square were still working away by the light of arc-lamps. The whole place was plastered with flags and black-and-white slogans and you couldn't move for electric cables where they were fixing up loudspeakers at all the corners. They'd finished putting up the banner across the hotel-front, and a lot of the shops on either side were

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draped with long black-and-white streamers, and there were microphones on the front of the rostrum and a huge photograph of Hugh Veron up above, taken sort of from one side so he didn't look so ferretty as usual. The posters with Mr. Marchbanks and Mr. Albertini and the rest looked a bit out of it, sort of pale and faded among the flags. The Veronist posters are good, you've got to give them that: they're all black and white with big plain letters, some saying "Veron" and some saying "Purity"; just that, nothing else. Somebody had stuck one of the "Purity" ones right across the middle of Mr. Albertini's face.

I was so busy gawping at all the workmen I didn't see Red till he came up and took my arm and then I jumped nearly a foot in the air. He grinned at me and said, "Scared, aren't you?"

"You'd scare anybody."

Of course it was only a joke, but for a minute he didn't look as if it was a joke, quite. Then he laughed. "Come up to my place."

I knew that routine well enough. "Are you sure you'll be safe with me?"

He measured me up against him very seriously, as if it mattered. "I'll risk it."

"Well, I don't know if I will. Wouldn't you rather eat?"

His face went absolutely blank for a minute. Then he said, "You know me better than that, Alice. I've got some food upstairs. Come and look at the circus."

And it was funny, but I did know him better than that. I went.

His place shook me, though. Since he was out of work and everything I hadn't figured that he'd have much money. I suppose if I'd thought, it figured that the money he spent on beer had to come from somewhere; though spacers are a bit like that. But he had a room about three floors up in the big hotel smack opposite the White Hart, right above the "R" of that banner; and spacers aren't like that at all. I was a bit surprised by the look of the room, too. Hotel rooms generally have that sort of tucked up, turned down appearance so's you'd think everybody who stayed there was a permanent total stranger, but this one was kind of ruffled round the edges as if all the furniture had been turned upside down since the maid did it in the morning, and put back not quite straight. Red grinned when he saw me looking.

"Veronist police. They've turned out the whole place twice today, and me too. You should see the inside of my suitcase."

"But what for?"

"Looking for arms, my innocent. You've no idea how lucky I am to be here. You need just the right sort of card for it."

He opened the window and we both leaned out. The big banner was flapping and swaying just un-

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derneath, and when you got close like that it wasn't really white at all but a kind of greyish canvas, and you could see the paint flaking on the black letters. The square was directly below with all the arc-lamps and the men running about like beetles, and the rostrum was right in the middle where you could look down on it.

"You'll have a tremendous view," I said. "Only he'll have his back to you."

"Yes. Pity, isn't it?" He turned and looked at me, but the arc-lamps and the blue light from the hotel's neon sign just above lit up his face in a queer kind of way so I couldn't see it properly. "Well, shall we eat?"

He had a lot of stuff in paper bags and some cans of beer and several bottles of stone ginger he said were for me.

"I'm grown up," I said. "I work across the street, remember?"

"You don't want to get into bad habits, just the same."

"Well, you seem to have got into them."

"Yeah, but then I've got this peculiar constitution." And he thumped the bottle down in front of me and that was that. I pretended to sulk, but really it was pretty nice to have somebody who thought I needed looking after. We ate out of the paper and drank beer and stone ginger out of the glasses from the washstand just for elegance, and every so often we'd look out of the window and see how they were doing down below. They had a lot of dark-coloured vans standing about that looked like television vans, but they didn't have the symbols of any of the regular networks, only the white Veronist circle. People kept climbing in and out of them with various sorts of black boxes and carrying ladders around. It really was as good as a circus.

When we'd nearly finished eating there was a loud, official kind of knock on the door, the sort that makes your stomach squeeze up even when you know you haven't done anything. Red put his glass down and went and opened it, and the corridor was full of men in white blouses. One or two of them laughed when they saw me, and one said, "Evening, miss," in a nasty leery kind of voice. In the end they were quite polite, though. They wanted to search the room, they said, and they had a paper from the Commissioner of Police that said they could. There was a miserable-looking little man in the corridor behind them who seemed to be the hotel manager, and he kept apologising and kind of rubbing his hands together and trying to smile, but nobody paid any attention to him.

They were very quick looking at things as if they were used to it, but they really opened everything, all the drawers and cupboards and Red's suitcase, and

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they looked in the wastebasket and under the mattress and they prodded the bed and some of them went round and thumped all the walls and window and door frames and the radiators, and then they looked at Red's papers and asked me who I was, and one opened my handbag and had a look inside my perfume box and screwed my eyestick up and down and made a joke about what women carry. Then they said they were sorry for disturbing us, and the leery one wished us goodnight and winked, and they went on next door with the little manager trotting behind them. They weren't really nasty, but it looked as though some of them were carrying guns under their blouses and they scared me.

The one who'd made the joke about my handbag stopped at the door and said to me, "How would you like Daddy Veron for World President, little lady?"

I was going to say I wouldn't at all and anyway I thought it was all Mr. Marchbanks and Mr. Albertini when Red kind of squeezed my arm, so I smiled at him politely instead and said that I didn't mind. And he laughed and said, "Well, before long maybe a lot of people's wishes are going to come true." And then they went away.

When they'd gone I asked Red, "Didn't you say they'd been already?"

"Yeah. Third time today. They'll be back tomorrow, too."

"But what for? If it was me, I wouldn't stay."

"Not even to see the show tomorrow?"

"Not for anything. And anyway, I thought only policemen could search people's rooms, and they aren't proper police at all."

Red looked at me real sober and he said, "You keep your voice down when you say that, Alice. Take a look here."

And he went over to the window and pointed into the square, and then I saw that a lot of the workmen down there weren't workmen, or at any rate they didn't seem to be doing anything; and they looked as if they might be carrying guns under their overalls too. And he said, "The proper police in any place are the people who have the power to make the law work there. And the law in any place is what the governing power is able to enforce. And the governing power . . ." And he looked at me and asked, "Do you know what this rally tomorrow is all about, Alice?"

So I said, "No." You don't get to know much in the back place of the White Hart, that's for a fact, even if I was interested in all that political stuff, which I'm not, and I didn't know what he meant anyway. He took a deep breath as if he was going to explain, and then he kind of shook his head and let it out again. "It doesn't matter. You stick to your dishes, kid, and most of all tomorrow. Better still,

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get sick if you can and stay away from here. This place is going to be rowdy in the morning."

It seemed to me maybe he was thinking I was some sort of moron and it made me sore. "You mean more vans and firehoses. It's all right, I'm not scared. We've had the police in two or three times already. I just hope Mr. Grey thinks to board up the windows first this time, before somebody breaks them again. But a little noise is exciting."

Then he lost his temper all of a sudden and grabbed my arms and really shouted at me. "What police? Haven't you been listening to what I said? Those are the police—them down there; them that were in here a minute ago. Have you had them in yet? You get sick, Alice, do you hear?"

Then I lost my temper too and yelled back, and told him I was old enough to mind myself, and I didn't need him to tell me what to do, and a whole lot more. And then I found I'd started to cry, so I snatched my handbag and ran for the door. And then he caught hold of me and we wrestled a little, and he got all gentle and loving again and in the end I stayed and after a while he took me home. But the things in the square had stopped looking so much like a circus, and the last thing he said to me, real serious, was, "Don't come to work tomorrow, Alice. Please."

And I said, "Well, maybe."

But of course I did.

Mind you, I started wishing I hadn't right after I turned the last corner and saw the people gathering there. There were a lot more of them than you'd think possible for a Monday when you'd expect everybody to be at work, and they were standing around in little groups kind of milling with their faces lit up and their eyes all shiny like people in a fairground, and a lot of them had the black badge with the white spot on their jackets. I'd heard that a lot of people belonged to Veronist organisations, but I'd never seen so many in one place before. Or maybe they just hadn't worn their badges so openly before, I don't know. You had to push your way past them to get through, and there seemed to be more and more on their way.

Not everybody was getting into the square, though. I saw one or two people being hustled away in the other direction by men in white blouses, and a gang of boys near me, six or seven of them, tried to push past a Veronist policeman, and he just kind of jerked his head and suddenly there were a whole ring of white blouses round the boys sort of moving up towards them, and they all looked like real rough persons. The boys backed away from them, and the police moved up a bit further, and they backed them that way right out of

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the square and then the circle opened to let them go and the gang disappeared down a side-street and I didn't see them any more.

A man in a white blouse came up to me outside the White Hart and asked very politely if I had a party card. I told him I worked there and he asked doing what and I told him, and he grinned and let me pass. Then he said, "Going to cheer for Daddy Veron?" but I was too scared to answer so I just kind of smiled at him and bolted down our alley and through into the back place and started sweeping floors like mad.

Mr. Grey was out on the front bar himself with his sleeves rolled up and Vera wasn't about. I guess she'd had more sense than me and stayed at home. There were only one or two people in—all the excitement that day was outside—and sure enough we still hadn't taken down our shutters, though the door was open. Ray and Martin were muttering together in a corner and Mr. Grey didn't look too happy himself.

"I think we'll shut up shop in an hour or so, Meg," I heard him say to Mrs. Grey. "No sense in asking for trouble."

"You'd better send the help home, then," she said.

"No, let them stay now they're here. There's plenty work for them in the cellars. And besides," I heard him add a bit lower, "you can't send that girl out in the street again alone. I never did believe that tale about the wardrobe. One of the men can take her back after the meeting."

"They'll be rioting till midnight, John."

"Then they'll just have to stay till midnight."

Mrs. Grey went to the doorway and had a look outside for herself, and when she came back in she closed the door behind her. "Well, now, Alice," she said, "since you and I are on our own we may as well give this place a real clean. Here," and she began piling my arms full of Bambis and Toby jugs, "you can begin by washing these. And when you've finished we'll do the pewter next."

So there I was in the back place, washing up as usual.

Our customers didn't stay long in that shut-up room, and when the last one left Mr. Grey locked the door behind him and bolted it. It was funny working in a totally empty place, and funnier still hearing your heels echo on the floor and your voice sort of muffled by the shutters with all that noise going on outside. You could see the streaks of sun coming in the cracks at the windows brighter than the bar lights so that inside seemed all dusty and yellow, and it was funny to think that it was mid-morning out there and the sky blue. It made it seem kind of hard to breathe.

The crowd was rowdy all right,

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but in a good-tempered expectant sort of way. You could hear the noise slowly rising as more and more of them arrived, but it wasn't a fighting noise, just an excited one. We got used to it after a while and just cleaned pewter in the bar without paying any more attention.

Then suddenly everything went quiet. The noise didn't just fade, it cut out as if it had been turned off with a switch. It was more frightening really than a riot. Mrs. Grey and I flew to the front door together, and we could hear the men behind us clattering up the cellar stair. When we got the door open everybody outside had their backs to us but their heads kind of twisted our way, and they were all standing quite still staring up into the sky. It was weird. You could hear the flags flapping and wires creaking overhead, and not a single voice.

Then we heard the sound of a copter coming in over the roof and it skimmed the crowd just in front of us and hovered right above the rostrum, a small black one with a white spot on each door. And one of the doors opened and a little flight of steps came down, and four men climbed out and stepped on to the rostrum, and the steps folded back in and the copter rose and flew away over the hotel. And Mr. Grey muttered behind me, "I knew it. Hugh Veron's private plane."

And then I saw that ferretty face up on the platform, and I knew I really had seen Hugh Veron himself after all.

The crowd went wild then. At first they just yelled and screamed until it seemed like the sky was coming down, but after a while somebody at the other side began a chant of, "Veron. Veron. Veron," and it spread until they were all doing it, and then the noise came crashing up at you in waves so you felt the sound was going to knock you over. And people began to wave their arms in the Veronist clasped-hand salute in time to the chanting so the crowd looked like some awful kind of machine all jerking away at once. And suddenly I found that I was laughing like a maniac with the tears streaming down my face and my throat aching with wanting to scream, and that chant blasted me back against the doorjamb so I couldn't move, and I didn't have the least notion what I was crying for.

Up on the rostrum Hugh Veron was holding up his arms for quiet, but for a long time the yelling just went on and on. Then it began to die away and you could hear a kind of booming from the loudspeakers that meant he was trying to talk. The crowd hushed up quickly after that, and he waved his arms some more, and then he started over.

"My dear brothers and sisters."

Everybody was absolutely quiet

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then, even us gawping in our doorway, and you could hear his beautiful bronzy voice clanging out of all the loudspeakers like a cathedral bell and you just knew that nothing he said could ever be a lie. Even his face changed when he talked and his lips opened square over his big white teeth and his eyes shone. I've heard people say that somebody's eyes blazed, but he was the only person I ever saw where you knew what it meant. He didn't just talk with his voice but with his whole face and his stomach and his backbone and all of him there was, and you couldn't not listen. He was like Elijah in the Bible, only alive and there, he was like God.

"I've come a long way to be here with you. Last night I ate dinner in Baluchistan. Tomorrow I must move on to New York. But today . . ."

We were holding our breath while he told us, it was like the inside of a church.

Everybody else must have heard the three cracks too and seen his hands jerk up and the sudden dark kind of blotch that spread over his face before he slid down and fell back on to the rostrum, but none of them moved. They were still listening for the next words and not understanding the awful ringing quiet on the microphones.

But I was out of there and through the back place and running like crazy before I'd even had time to think, because I knew what they didn't. And I'd never felt so afraid before, not even the day I got Grane's letter and knew what it said before I opened it. Because some things I don't need to be told.

It took me a long time to get round to the back of the hotel because even the sidestreets were full of people who hadn't been able to get into the square itself, but luckily they didn't know yet what had happened. You could hear the shrieks and yells of the crowd in the square quite plainly over the loudspeakers in all the streets, but they were making such a racket that the official who seemed to be trying to talk to them from the platform couldn't be heard at all. You could tell something was wrong, and you could tell there was a voice trying to say something, but nobody knew what. So I managed to shove my way through without too much trouble. I reckoned I was probably faster than most of the police anyhow, because although it was a long way round I knew the streets while you couldn't move in the square.

I didn't know which way he'd go, naturally. All I'd thought about when I started running was to get to the back of that hotel quickly and be with him. I hadn't even thought he might not want me. I thought all that on the way, while I was shoving people's backs and elbows aside and saying, "Ex-

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cuse me, excuse me," over and over, but by then there didn't seem any point in turning back so I just kept running. It was like one of those dreams where you're chasing somebody who's always round the next corner. I ran up and down streets and in and out of alleys and when I didn't see what I wanted in one I ran to the next. I nearly went slap into a gang of Veronist police once, but luckily they didn't know where they were going either and I dodged into a backyard and they didn't see me. And I knew who I was looking for and they didn't, and that did it in the end. I saw some red hair under a cap among a crowd at a crossing, and I kicked and pushed straight through to it and it was him. And I burst right out crying.

Red looked at me for a second as if he didn't know me, and then he kind of choked and said, "Alice," and then he caught hold of my arm and nearly fell and I could see he was hurt. Maybe a crying woman was what he needed, at that. The news about Veron was just beginning to get through and the crowd around us was pretty wild. One man by himself and groping that way might have been noticed, but two people leaning on each other and one crying fit to bust didn't seem so funny when everybody was howling and crying.

Twice men in white blouses stopped and looked at us, with their guns in their hands this time, and both times they passed on. Then we got to a road where there were fewer people, and Red said, "Down here," and we went down an alley and through two or three yards and finally we reached a tatty old brick warehouse and there was a door that led to a cellar.

There was an old bed there and a chair, and a couple of beer-crates with bottles in them, all at the bottom of a flight of steps. He'd been leaning on me more and more heavily all the way and when we got to those steps we nearly fell straight down. I managed to grab him in time and I got him down and on to the bed somehow and knelt over him to open his coat, but he shook his head.

"Bolt the door, kid," he said in a kind of gasp, "I've got to get rid of this."

He was wearing a loose jacket with big pockets, and I'd felt something hard sticking into me but I hadn't had time to wonder what it was. Of course I knew he'd killed Hugh Veron, but it still gave me a shock when he pulled two bits of metal out of those pockets and dropped them on the bed. They were two halves meant to screw together in the middle, and you could see that they fitted together into a queer squat-looking kind of rifle.

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Put them back where they

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came from." He gave me a funny kind of smile and I saw dark red stuff oozing from among his hair where his cap had fallen off, and trickling down the side of his face. "Bolt the door, honey."

I went back up the stairs and did it, top and bottom, and turned the key for good measure. When I came back he was lying still with his jacket and shirt open, and they were both horribly stained. The gun had disappeared, but I didn't care about that. I could see the hole in his side and the dark stuff that was running out of it, and my throat shut up so tight it just cut off my crying like a tap. I'd never seen anything like it and I didn't know where to begin.

"I've got to get a doctor . . ." I said.

He grinned with his teeth bare and stretched out a hand to me. "Don't bother, girl. Come over here."

"Oh, God. What shall I do? Is there any water? My stupid petticoat's nylon. Oh, help me." I was so frantic I was leaving teeth-marks in my knuckles. "Tell me what to do."

"Come over here." He'd eased off now and he sounded perfectly calm and gentle, not as if it hurt him at all. "Do you know what human ribs ought to look like, Alice? Human blood?"

I swallowed on my throat and made myself stop. "It's all right," I said, "I've seen blood before, just not such a lot. I'll fix it for you. Just let me get some water."

"No." He'd got hold of my wrist and I couldn't get it loose. "If you know what blood looks like, honey, take a closer look at mine. And while you're looking, ask yourself how I got that gun into a room that was searched three times yesterday and twice today, and how I got it out and fastened it together without being stopped, with two policemen right in the room with me looking out of the window at the time." His face was grey like stone but his shiny green eyes were still the same person and trying desperately to make me hear him. "You think you're in love with me. I've killed three men today, Alice, all as a matter of business. I didn't know any of them personally, and two of them I don't know a thing against except they were sitting at my window when I needed it. One of them I messed the job a little and he shot me leaving. I deserved that. Now look at my ribs and my blood."

I looked and I could feel I was beginning to shake.

"Yes, that's metal, girl," he said. "I can break a man's back with one hand if I have to, and I carry a gun the only place a man can who's going to have his room searched three times a day." And he moved a hand towards his open shirt, and I could see the fine seam in the skin down his chest and belly, like the shadow of an old

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scar. And I could see the welling wound, too, and the dark red soaking away into the blankets, running and running with nothing to clot and stop it because the hole was too big and it had none of the right stuff in it, and the tears spilled over out of my eyes and ran down and I couldn't stop them either.

Then he sat up on the bed and leaned over and put his arm round me. "Alice," he said, "don't you cry. I'm not dying, you only imagine it. That's what I'm trying to tell you. I can't die because I'm dead already. I'm not a man, Alice. There was a man once—a red-haired man called Stoney Middleton. It was a corny kind of joke his father thought up, because that isn't even a person, it's a place. So they called him Red." And he grinned at me with his face all kind of twisted up as if he wanted to cry and couldn't.

"Not that it matters. Stoney Middleton was a secret service agent, a big-time hero who got killed out on Venus a year or two back sticking his nose in where it didn't belong. Only he happened to be one person who knew a lot about Veron and his habits and the Service had his brain-patterns on file, so when they wanted Veron disposed of they built those patterns into me, and just for laughs they made me look like him too. It was pretty safe because nobody knew him Earthside. And that's me. Red Middleton, the corpse that won't lie down. The boys back at Headquarters have just about split themselves laughing over it. They've got another copy back on Venus which is sending the Veronists nuts there trying to figure how he came to life again when they disposed of the body personally. And that's all I am, Alice. An android. A zombie. There's only one thing wrong, girl."

And he suddenly pulled me close up against him and buried his face in my chest as if he wanted to get inside, and I could see his red hair all tangled and thick with that dark kind of oozing that wasn't quite blood, and he was shaking all over with the tears he couldn't cry. "I feel like Red Middleton. No matter what I do, I can't stop believing I'm a man."

And I put my head down against his, and I could feel the dark stuff all sticky on my cheek, and I hung on to him the way I hung on to my baby the night they came to take him away, and I cried so I thought I'd never stop. And after a while he kind of sighed and lay still, and I thought perhaps he was sleeping. But androids don't, do they? But I went on holding him anyway, and the dark stuff soaked into my frock right through and got all stiff and dry on my face, and you'd have thought I'd have got tired sitting there but I didn't, I couldn't feel anything

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at all. And I don't care if there are ten copies on Venus or all over, and I don't care if they're made of glue and silver paper. I don't care what he did or who he did it for. His name was Red Middleton and I loved him and he's dead.

MICKEY FINN

He thought, *I get myself to heaven. There I find*
the angels moulting.
The streets of gold
were ankle-deep in feather.
He shrugged, resigned. He did not even say,
As I expected.

This man had watched from childhood growing signs
he called his private Mickey Finn conception:
Order, the Universe, or God, he claimed
must have been drugged. It was an explanation.

Later, when Faith had flown
while Hope was necking with a halter
he once, space-traveling, had found the *alter*
ego of earth—found, too, a girl
whose long blue eyes held wisdom as some stones
hold stars of light; or so he thought.

He married her. Then someone
began to whisper that the bride's clear eyes
were knowing, really, instead of wise.
That day he left her.
The sun was never afterward so bright;
he thought perhaps it rose a little late,
but he philosophized
that would be fate.

One day that man took an impressive stance
and cried, "I shall give God
just one more chance,"
than found his way to heaven . . .

—Doris Pitkin Buck

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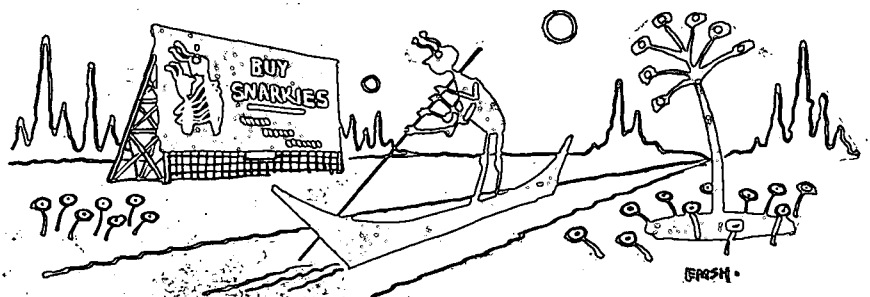

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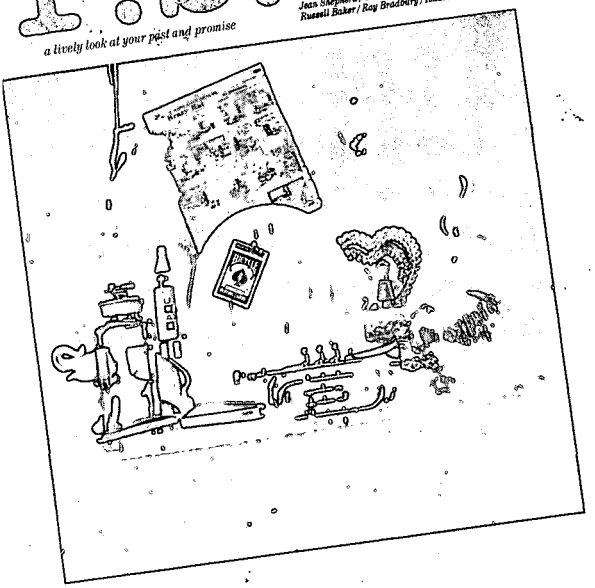

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